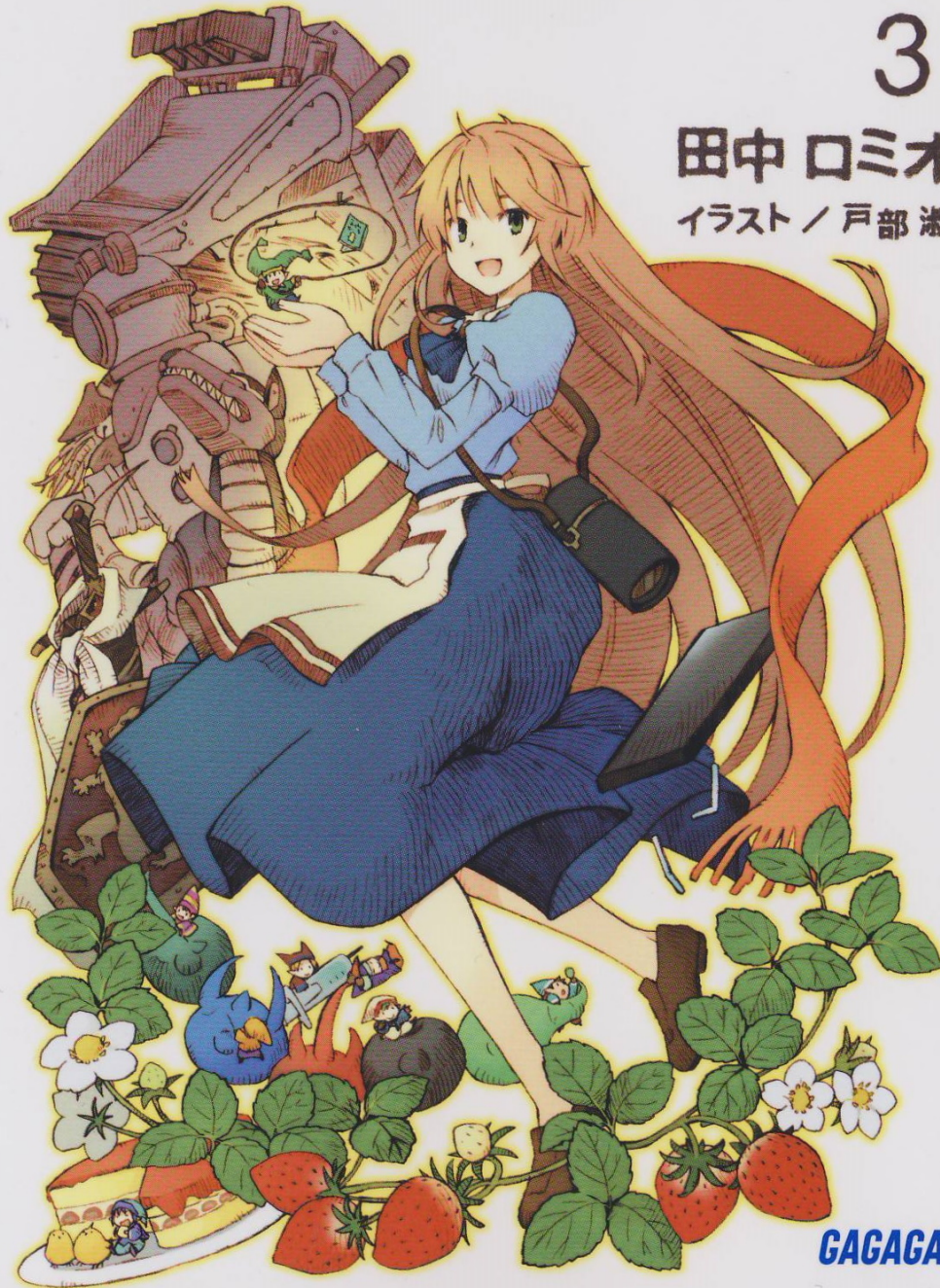


人類は衰退しました

3

田中 ロミオ

イラスト / 戸部 淑



人類は衰退しました3

田中 ロミオ

イラスト／戸部 淑



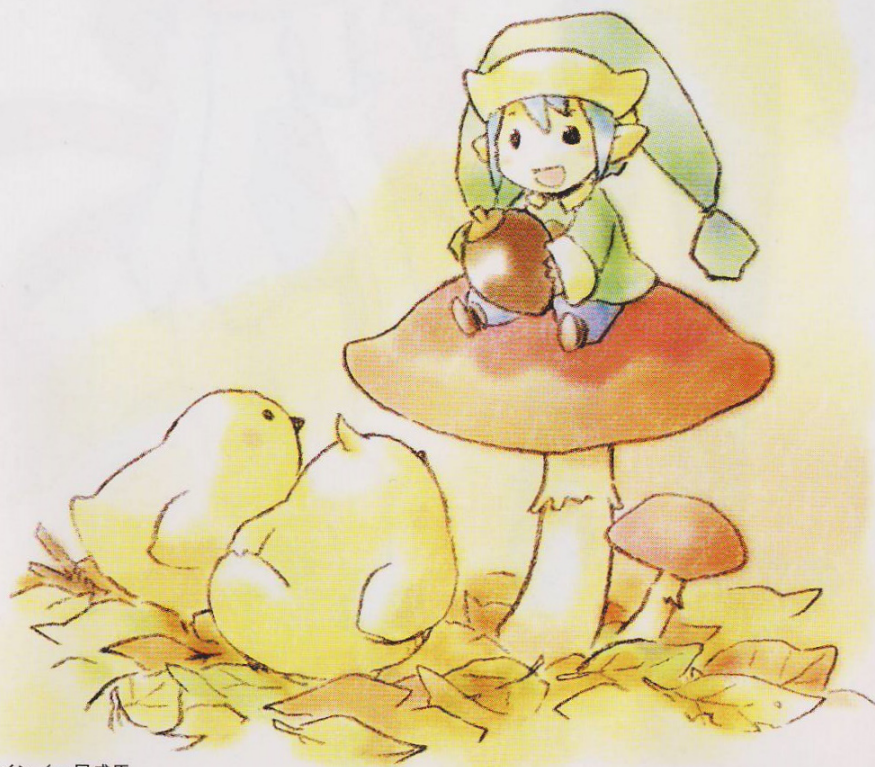
CONTENTS

The Fairies and the Return Home...8

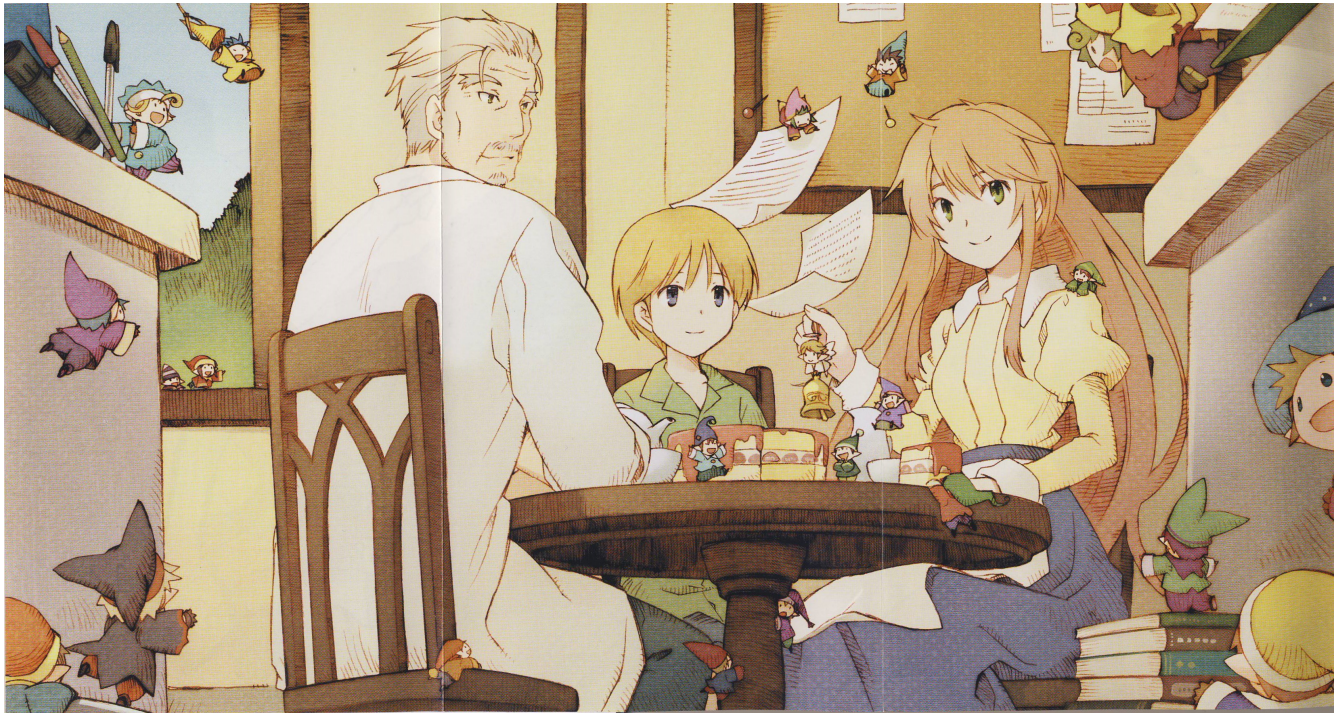
Tea Dragon and the Potted Plant City...144

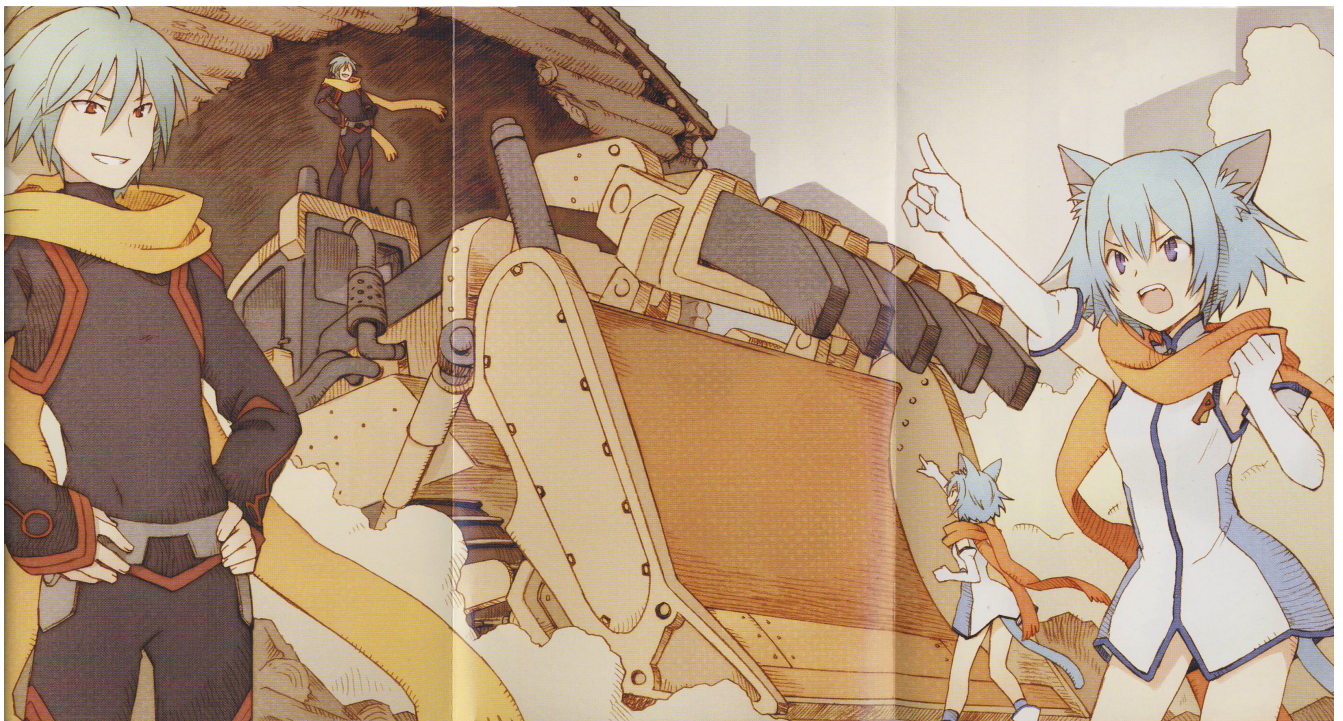
Periodic Report - June...153

Afterword...154



デザイン／一尾成臣





人類は衰退しました

3



MAIN CHARACTERS 主 要 キ ャ ラ ク タ ー

Protagonist (Watashi, "I") Narrator of the story. Mediator of Kusunoki Village. **Fairies** at present, the people who count as humanity on this Earth. **Grandfather** Protagonist's grandfather. Boss of the Office of Mediation in Kusunoki Village.

P-Ko Alias Pyon. A petite catgirl wearing a long scarf and a badge shaped like a P. **O-taro** Alias Oldman. **UNESCO Cultural Chief** a smooth middle-aged gentlemen. Nickname VIP Boss.

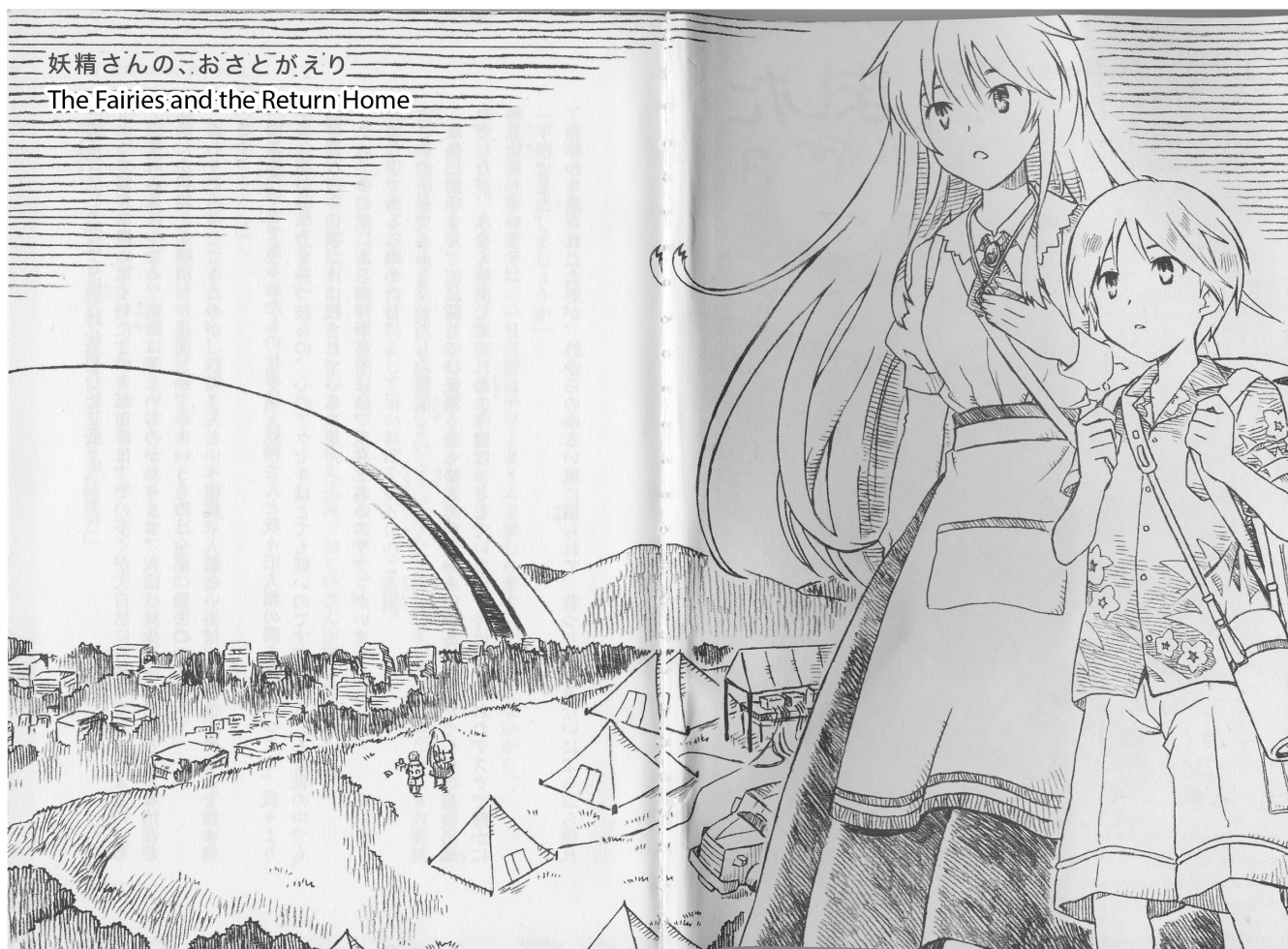
From the back cover:

Humanity Has Declined 3

Humanity has met with a gradual decline, and for some centuries now. Earth was now the property of the Fairies. Acting as intermediary between said fairies and humans were the international public servants known as Mediators, which was my job. ...a do-nothing job, that said. Under the influence of the People Monument Project, whose goal were every records of humanity currently under that highly-praised decline, electricity came to be provided to Kusunoki Village, the Village of the Camphor Tree, and a Summer Electrical Festival opened its doors. For their own, the fairies were going back home. ...?! The fairies are going to disappear?! After a bizarre parting, we headed for an investigation of the archaeological ruins of a city, but... make sure to plan your energy supply!

妖精さんのおさがえり

The Fairies and the Return Home



Hominidae primates were a thing of the past.

The majority of the cities that once filled the surface of the Earth to the brim had been swallowed by nature. The land where people did live was scarce, and their decline was remarkable. The population did nothing but continue to decrease, and things like politics, war, crime, economics, or discrimination, they were, all of them, things of the past.

What rose to prominence in their stead was the species known as Fairies. To the point that, when discussing 'humanity', at present one indicates them.

My job as a United Nations Mediator was to act as intermediary between them and us Former Humanity. They, who possessed technological powers far beyond ours, had an accelerator in their hearts that was easy to stomp on. That was the reason why, even in this situation, the work of Mediator still remained.

The Office of Mediation in Kusunoki Village, had at present three staff members.

I, who was the one narrating this.

My Grandfather, who was also the boss here.

Last was Assistant-san. With regards to him, last time many things happened that even involved the fairies. It was a sort of complicated event, but it ended well, which was a relief. At present he was quietly writing at the desk assigned to him.

It was peaceful.

The doll hung on the window frame was fanned by the slack wind from outside, elegantly swaying like a cadaver hung by its neck.

"...shall we have tea?"

In our Office of Mediation we enjoyed teatime five times a day. That was because we had nothing to do.

The month was June. It was the season for that fantastic fruit, the strawberry.

Its overwhelming preciousness, the abundance of their expressiveness that steals the onlookers' hearts, the vivid sense of coloring with red as its basis, their aspect that yet resembled a detailed painted masterpiece... it was truly superb to consume these master's produce as they were, but they could be put to an indefinite number of services as ingredients for sweets.

And because of that, even today's dessert included strawberries.

Grandfather put a person-shaped bookmark in between the pages of a thick, old book and lifted his face.

"What's the teacake?"

"A cheesecake with a full load of strawberries. It is quite cold."

"Sounds good."

A cheesecake well-moist with strawberries and cream it held in between, plus strawberry sauce poured in from above. I was quite confident about it. Despite how cheesecakes were already almost too delicious to handle on their own, on top of those...

On top of the round table for the tea I put the intact cake to the knife, Grandfather brought the kettle, and Assistant-san brought in enough cups for everyone, we had everything.

"The milk, please, Assistant-kun. As usual's fine."

"..."

Assistant-san nodded. He went to take the milk pot, which had a design with a doll holding the handle, and was being cooled in the cold water where the waterworks were.

Cold milk was poured into teacups so delicate they looked like they would shatter just by pouring hot water into them. The amount of milk was based on every person's preference. I was for moderate, Assistant-san for abundant, Grandfather for little. On top of that came

plenty of hot tea.

The scent that immediately spread within the room made us instantly feel happier.

"Then, let us have it."

"Mh-hm."

The three of us surrounded the table, the rest was only gobbling it all down.

"...not gonna ring it?"

What Grandfather pointed out with his chin was a teensy table bell set down on the table itself. Its design had an angel dangling.

"Ahhh, you are correct. I forgot."

A swing of the table bell, and a timbre like spreading lapis lazuli gently filled the room.

When it did—

"Yes!"

The doll hanging by the neck in the window frame suddenly straightened its limbs and slipped out of the noose.

"Spasibo!"

The volume set on top of Grandfather's desk suddenly opened with a slam. He who was standing in the center of the book in a banzai pose had been serving as a bookmark until moments before.

"Gracias!"

The fairy that was decorating the milk pot hopped off.

"I've been waiting!" "Merci!" "Fever!"

The fairy that was pinned to the corkboard, the fairy holding a pipe and working hard as a pen stand, the fairies that made a pair and worked as bookstands, and lastly the fairy that had become an angel on the table bell, all of them gathered on top of the table.

"Another busy day, I see."

Fairies really loved humans. They had up and decided to take service as daily necessities, and days like these had become the norm.

"Ca-ke! Ca-ke!"

"Fine, fine, there is enough for all of you."

And that was how today too we had a lively teatime.

"Assistant-kun, how are the picture books working out?"

"Well now, picture books, did you say?"

"I know it's belated, but I thought it would be good for cultivating his taste. I'm having him draw."

Assistant-san brought a sketchbook from his own seat.

"So you did not have him read, but preferred having him draw, is that correct?"

"..."

The sketchbook was wordlessly offered to me.

"F-, for me?"

It must be the title of the picture book. On the front in large letters there was written, *Friends of the Wood*.

"So, I can read this?"

Wordless Assistant-san bobbed his head.

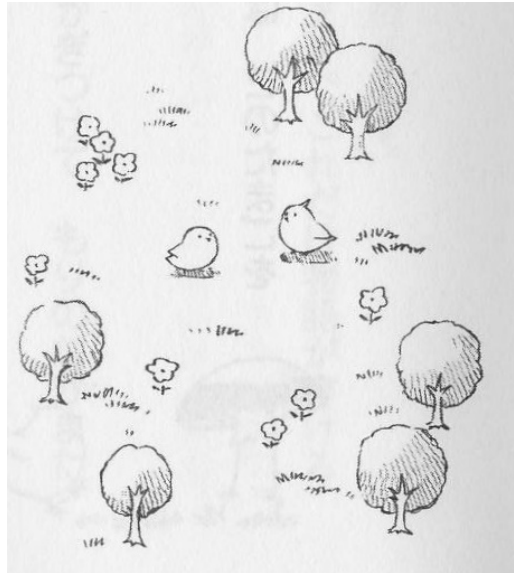
I set it on the table and opened it to the first page so that everyone could see it. Pale pastel illustrations and words jumped out at me.

"This is surprising. You are proficient with illustrations, I see."

The style of drawing was not one that worried about perspective.

The pages were comparable to the whole of the earth, with trees and flowers drawn dotted around like in a map. With a simple composition, the characters that appeared were also tiny, and were treated equally to the trees and stones. Maybe his was a style that did not emphasize characters, maybe the viewpoint had a distance from them, that was how it felt. The protagonists were two little yellow birds... like chicks.

Chicks Tenderloin and Chickwing were good friends



The picture book began with that opening passage.

"This looks like a relaxed tale, does it not."

The intricately drawn picture book seemingly invited the interest of the fairies, as they shuffled around it with their cheeks still stuffed with cake.

"Doodles?" "A manga, I wonder!" "Looks fun!" "I can't even imagine the story!" "If the plot is boring..." "If it was, the professionals would never tolerate it!" "We're not made for this!" "This is something only humans can do!"

W-, was that so?

A supertechnological society that could not make sweets or stories was an inexplicable thing.

(Second page)

Tenderloin and Chickwing were really hungry. They went to search for food in the woods.

"So that's what they do with their days!" "Do they specialize in food gathering?" "There's a sort of disappointment in the air!"

The fairies' commentary was unexpectedly harsh.

(Third page)

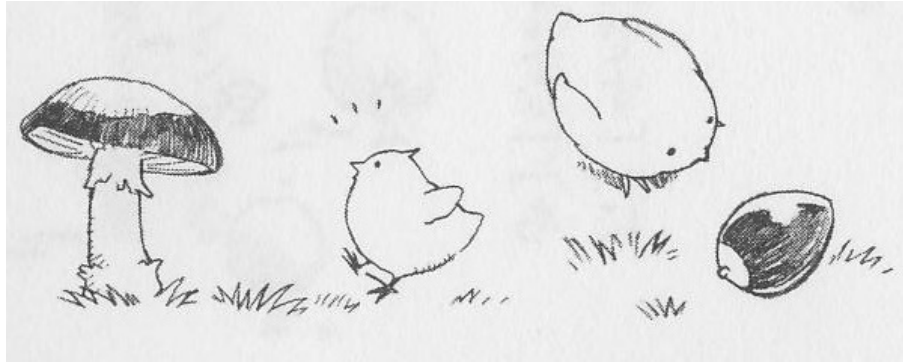
There was an acorn! Tenderloin really loved them! That was because they were like sweets!

"I buy it, I buy it!" "I buy it, yeah!" "Like a gift from a visitor!" "That's affirmative!" "Acorns are really delicious things!"

It was not like they could not be used for sweets, but acorns were comparatively unrewarding tree fruits for their effort, indeed. They were comparable to walnuts.

(Fourth page)

They also discovered a mushroom! Chickwing couldn't have enough of them.



"Every time I find a mushroom I sit on it!" "They make for good chairs!" "But not desks." "For walks, or something?"
Fairies would definitely sit on them.

(Fifth page)

A very very big egg was laying there. Tenderloin and Chickwing decided to make this egg into an omelet.

The scenes that followed after that lasted until they had managed, with difficulties, to cook the large egg.

It was quite the solid story, and I found myself reading it all. If he was able to write a story like this, he had no need of cultivation of taste, I believed.

(Tenth page)

At long last the omelet was done! Oh, but what is this? Smelling a nice scent, the friends of the wood all gathered, you see?

(Eleventh page)

Squirrel, rabbit, mole, bird, deer, mouse, cat, boar, and lion – they all gathered and had to eat!

"The next one looks like the last, but... mh?"

Impatient, Grandfather peeked alone into the next page. With things going like this I predict they will all have the omelet and live happily ever after, but... for some reason Grandfather made a seriously troubled face.

"Please let me see!"

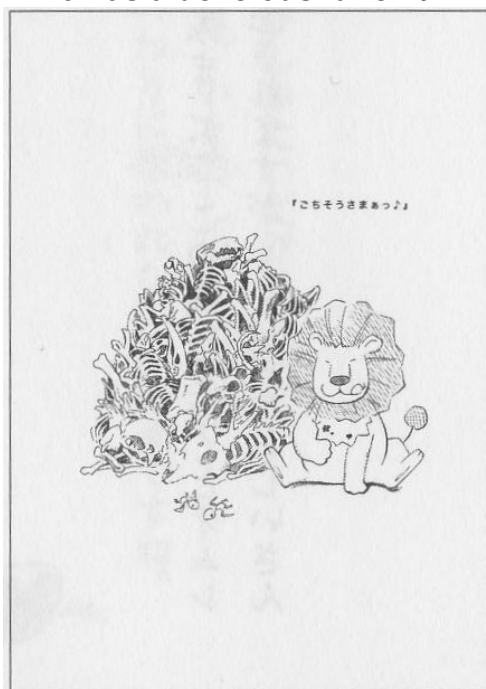
I opened to the next page.

"....."

And there was a shocking scene.

(Twelfth page)

It was a delicious lunch!♪¹



The last one to come, the lion, had eaten the friends of the woods down to the bones!

"Cultivation of taste: desperately needed!!!"

It seemed that a dark shadow still existed in Assistant-san's heart!

It was cruel, this conclusion, it was so very cruel!

Grandfather declared this with a voice low enough only I could hear.

"Thinking about it, for being correct it's correct... as far as endings."

"You say that like you are impressed, but what do we do about this terrifying drawing?"

The only things drawn with a pastel touch on the last page were the bones of the animals piled into a mountain and a lion with a stomach full, which also made for a ridiculously surreal drawing.

"You don't think that the basic concept of friends of the woods itself is a magnificent deception?"

"Problems like those you think about only after you have become an adult!"

"Mh-hm. If a real kid read this it would end really badly."

That said, the fairies were not moved by that shocking conclusion.

"Law of the?" "Jungle!" "I see!" "A convincing conclusion, right?" "Mr. Lion plans to keep all the delicious ingredients to himself!" "Realistic!"

They liked that?

"That was fun!"

"..."

The fairies and Assistant-san grasped each other's fingertips, exchanging a mutual understanding that was incomprehensible to all but them.

In the end, the decision that came was that Assistant-san should be reading, rather than drawing.

¹ This is also what the drawing says.

The caravan scheduled for arrival at the end of May instead entered the village several days into June.

Next to the truck that had encamped in the Village's square there were already people with too much free time on their hands, gathering and starting a banquet. Even this slight festival-like bustle was a common scene.

It had become customary for those living in the village to show face when the caravan came even if they had no particular business or need. Even I, with my tendency to fear strangers, happened to drop by when I had too many rationing tickets.

A simple beer hall that was just a large tent. Open-air shops lined with wooden crates. Fruits, cereals, dairy products, condiments, toys and utensils and tableware and clothes – there were as many shops as there were people.

A bottle of lemon and pear jam. A Summer blouse and skirt. One knife for cooking. A large bottle of cut fruits marinated in rum. Having obtained all those things, I was about to withdraw towards my house. And then, in this square feverish with body heat, I spotted Grandfather. He seemed to be in talks with the people of the caravan. Thinking that it was maybe bad to interrupt, I was about to leave the place, but he called to me first.

"Heeey, c'mere a sec."

"...yes, what is it?"

I was introduced to a slender gentleman whose approximate age was his fifties.

"This is my granddaughter. 'Oi, this is the chief of the cultural office at UNESCO."

Chief of cultural office? That much of a big shot?

"I am very pleased to meet you, I am his granddaughter."

"So you're his granddaughter. Been hearing rumors about you for a while. Seems that you're really giving it all."

The deluxe aura that only VIPs have was stressing me out even more.

"It is nothing... I am doing nothing worth mentioning."

"Heheheh, I hope you will continue to take care of things even from here on out."

How there were rumors about me was sort of concerning, but it was not quite a situation where I could hold a conversation.

"Hahah!"

"Truth is, the UN is going to start a new project. I came here to tell you about it and discuss it."

"A new project? Truly?"

"Yeah, it's a fact," Grandfather added. "It's called the People Monument Project. We've had that thing for several decades now, but it was always kept frozen."

"Is it a really large scale project?"

"Yes, it's as you say, miss granddaughter. It's on a very large scale. No less than planetary scale."

Planetary scale!

"The project is to leave behind for our posterity a monument with a mass storage device holding a variety of records regarding our culture within."

"You speak of a variety of records, but I must wonder, there are so many that...?"

"Right. It's all of them."

"Huh?"

"We're going to make a summary of people, that's what. The monument must remain even after we're gone, and when the new species that will rule the Earth has matured more, it must provide them with appropriate guidelines. Consequently, we would ideally summarize all the possible data regarding culture and science and history, granddaughter-chan."

I really did not like being called granddaughter-chan.

"That does appear difficult to implement, however."

Everything about people. Everything about a people who felt imaginary.

"Making a complete record is our ideal. In practice, the work's going to be of compiling as much data as possible in order to get as close to that as we can," went Grandfather.

"Is it going to be in writing?"

"No, we're scratching together the skills that remain even in present times and making a unique structure for recording. Next up will be to input the gathered data from one end. The structure will be a monument, therefore it has to be appropriately robust. The concept at present is shaped like a monolith."

Monolith was a word that indicated in a wide sense all the types of stone monument-ish things, but for some reason it gave me the strong image of a black parallelepiped. The monolith that he spoke about a moment ago also had to be the latter.

"All of that only using the scientific skills of current humanity?"

For being a hobby undertaken during retirement it had quite the backbone, indeed.

"Finishing the monolith is going to take several years or more, though."

"How about borrowing the powers of the fairies?"

"...do you think they will do things as designed?"

"That would certainly be a problem..."

After all, the fairies' technology focused on their mood.

"You got a very close relationship with the fairies, it's said. Even we heard rumors of that."

"So you have..."

"However, for this we'd like to hold back on the fairies. The gathering of information is being carried out in every region, you see. It's just that there's plenty of metropolitan ruins near Kusunoki Village, adding sensei's knowledge and experience, including his personal library and everything, makes this a very promising land as far as the excavation of information. Of course, we also have good expectations from your skills, Granddaughter-chan."

"Huh..."

"We're probably going to request the cooperation of the village in the investigation of the metropolitan ruins."

"This is really on a large scale, I see."

The metropolitan ruins, which were from a period we were uncertain about, had been largely eroded by the forest. This necessarily increased the labor of an investigation, and the rewards for it were going to be scarce.

"If only there were electricity in there, at least, it would have been better."

Nothing beyond the minimum required power generation was left to humanity at present.

"No need to worry about that," asserted Grandfather. "We have long since confirmed that there are working artificial satellites. Their control codes were also secured, so our outlook is that we should be able to use them immediately as long as the electricity gathering antennas are operational."

"Meaning we would have as much electricity as we want?"

"No, it's for the investigation. It's gonna be used in turns in the areas all 'round the world where investigation is scheduled, it won't be supplied to the population."

"Well now."

I was expecting the beginning of a life of ease.

"And given that's how it is, granddaughter-chan, we definitely want you to participate to the search when it happens."

"I see."

I could not return anything but a vague reply.

After all, see, it looked like annoying and heavy work, this did. I did hope the plan would not come to fall through, that said.

A youngster of the Village came by, alone, running while panting out of breath.

"Excuse me, sirs, may I have a moment!"

"What's it about?"

"A meteorite has fallen in that field over there!"

"So, this is the meteorite in question."

As Grandfather seemed to have more to talk about with that boss, Assistant-san and I were dispatched one step ahead of them. Our main order was to secure the location, however, we were not trusted with doing that much. Securing the location meant making sure Grandfather could investigate when he came, and that meant making sure the rubbernecks did not come close.

When we arrived there, we found that the damage was not as serious as we thought.

It was an idled plot in the suburbs. There were nearly no onlookers, nor any spreading fire.

There was just about no need to do any work.

"Still, just in case, let us secure the location."

In a pair with Assistant-san we delimited the location with stakes and rope.

"Still, well... this thing..."

At the center of a crater around ten meters of diameter there was a dark metal plank, tilted sideways as if it had been planted in there, totaling a length of around thirty centimeters.

"It does look like a monolith."

I tried touching it and was surprised to find that it had no heat whatsoever. If it is something that came from outer space, however, I believe it would be emitting a strong heat due to friction.

"This is man-made, indeed."

Assistant-san also vigorously nodded.

I heard that humans too, once, had reached high levels of science.

"So this thing was wandering above the orbits of satellites, and only recently fell down?"

I thought it a reasonable concept. That being said, with our knowledge we could not come up with a conclusion. We knew nothing at all about space. Whatever it was, we would have to wait for Grandfather.

Something torpedo-like approached, making the low grassland shake. It approached at a high speed while zig-zagging, and once it had come right before our noses, it hopped and stood vertical.

"Tah-dah!"

It was a fairy.

"Thank you for all your work."

"Why, didn't this fall down?"

"It looks like. See?"

"Oooh, what do we have here, it's all black..."

Without any shyness he repeatedly poked its surface.

There was a rustling sound, then new fairies showed their faces from every side.

"Hallooo!" "We came!" "What's fallen down here?" "Lemme join in!"



"Mh-hm, roll call."

The five fairies formed one row shoulder to shoulder.

"First!" "Second!" "Third!" "Left!" "Right!"

The synchronization of the five was perfect! (This was a lie.)

"Is this monolith perhaps made by your hands, fairies?"

The five consulted. As representative one stepped forwards.

"This is the first time we've seen this."

"I see..."

So it was actually a product of human technology?

I tried holding it in hand, and found it was far lighter than I thought. Around five kilograms.

".....hmmm."

I tried shaking it. It made a rattling sound. Was it hollow?

"It makes a rattle-rattle sound?" "Maybe it has a present inside?" "It has a false bottom?" "The present is small, as a box it's bad." "Too commercialistic!"

"From what precise era would you have to be for a conversation like that to be understandable, really?"

"Who knows?"

"The lightness and this sound... I have a feeling this is juuust garbage."

Curiosity and interest I were abundantly wilting.

"Heeey, how's that?"

"Ah, Grandfather. This is just..."

"Why you, you touched it? You had to secure the location, and that... forget it, first show it to me."

Having me beat him to the punch seemed to frustrate him a little.

"A monolith? The thing was a meteorite, they said... did this really fall from the sky?"

"It did make a crater, see? It was stuck right in the middle."

"...it's too light. What the hell is this? This is so light that it can't exist. This is just a prank by someone, isn't it? Normally, you see, meteorites fell to the Earth in the K-T boundary (the Cretaceous-Tertiary boundary) and extinguished the dinosaurs all nice and cleanly, for one. What if... they had been this light? It's like a cookie can."

"At the very least, it appears not to be a fairy prank."

"...so it's a human prank."

Grandfather thoroughly inspected the monolith from up close, flipping it over and turning it upside down. However, eventually, he distanced the metal board like interest had been peeled off him.

"If this really fell..."

"Impossible, I'd say. It should have burned in the high atmosphere. I can't feel any of the harshness of outer space from this metal board."

Grandfather chucked the monolith in the middle of the crater.

"...this is a prank."

"So it seems."

"Coming back?"

Grandfather began walking.

"Assistant-saaan, we are going back!"

"..."

Assistant-san was having his eyes stolen by a belt thick with green that conspicuously clung to the foot of a mountain on the other side of a gentle hill. What he was absorbed by I

recognized right away.

"It is a city, that there."

"...?"

For being a terribly untalkative sort, Assistant-san spoke a lot with his eyes quick to moisten, manners, gestures, and the like.

"Indeed, it is an old town. That is what we call the ruins. At present no one is living there. There may be wild dogs there, it has many dangers."

"..."

"What? It looks interesting? Do you have an interest in cities?"

To Assistant-san, who had lived alone since early childhood, cities were something to gaze at with some type of longing.

"Hoh, interested in metropolitan ruins, are you, Assistant-kun. That's just the proper thing to have." Grandfather seemed to be thinking about that monument project from before. "If you're interested, how about coming with?"

"..."

Assistant-san stared fixed at Grandfather and gave him a tiny nod.

"You're coming too, all right."

"...well, I was resolved to that, so I do not mind."

"Going for a trip?" "We wanna go too!" "Is it a problem if we come with?"

Grandfather said this with an attitude different from the one he had when he dealt with me.

"I'm sorry. This is an investigation that must be done by humans alone."

"...I see..."

Their round and cute eyes seemed unchanged from their usual, but they were swimming with some sadness, if just a little.

"If you can promise that you will not make the usual mischief, we could take one of you with as representative, you know?"

"Could you?"

"As long as he is the obedient kind."

"Bwaaay!" "We're gonna choose!" "We gotta have a talk!" "Who's obedient?" "Who knows!"

A conversation that did not appear likely to conclude had begun.

"What do we do with this monolith?"

"Leave it."

And so we decided to leave it be and return to the office.

The fairies did not come to a conclusion, they just vanished suddenly.

Days passed again, and a time came when the noise about the meteorite had been relegated to the edges of memories.

I had left the office before sunset and was about to return home when I said to myself that I would window shop at the trading place for a little, but as I was headed for the main street of the village—

"W-, what is this...?"

There was a bustle like a festival's.

People with faces I was not familiar with were going disorderly going back and forth, and high scaffolds that covered the houses that the people passed past had been installed. Men were going back and forth not just on the ground, but also in the air, using those scaffolds... and so it was quite proper for me to feel something out of the ordinary.

Looking quite closely, I found that horse carriages and wagons packed with baggages had

been parked here and there. Among them there were some used as stalls, and there were even motorized cars, rare in these parts, parked there.

I was hesitating as to whether I should be cutting across the center square when there was so much vigorous work activity, but I was able to catch the distribution center lady who was walking right on the other side.

"Excuse me, just what is all this noise about?"

"My, you're the one from sensei's place. It's nothing, just preparations for a festival."

"Was a festival scheduled?"

"It's nothing, it's just something they decided suddenly."

The farmer's wife herself, for example, had been put in charge of cooking and was heading to her kitchen. After giving her my thanks and watching her leave, I dazedly gazed around this place with a mood so utterly different from the one I had when I had gone off to work that morning. It was truly a sudden festival. In that case, the provenance of the people I did not know had to be villagers from neighboring settlements who had come here to help, as well as other people related to that, I supposed.

Loud voices, the sort I normally did not hear, flew back and forth, and the square was alive in ways it normally was not, a level of activity such that I wondered whether there were more guests than people of the land.

I watched for a while, and I saw a man shouldering something that seemed like a black tied rope running towards his coworkers.

"Is this cable OK?"

"Yeah, that's the one. I saw them connecting it with this twenty years ago."

It looked like that was some sort of coil of electrical wire for business use.

Another man extended that wound coil that was about an armful in size.

"Hey, is this the wrong one? It's got the right socket on it, though."

"Yeah, these are for the decorative stuff."

"What decorative stuff?"

"You know, decorations that light up and stuff."

"...so what the hell do I do with this. It different from the lighting stuff?"

"Bof, these colored lightbulbs can't work as illumination anyway."

"Uh-huh. Then you don't need this?"

"Bof, it's still fine, innit? We just put it someplace to decorate it. Boss said that we should also get out with the electrical appliances wherever's appropriate."

"So I just put them 'round the houses as I like."

He shouldered the cable thing again, then he disappeared within this bustle that knew no quiet.

"Testing, testing! Mike test! Mike test!"

"Eeek!"

An ear-splitting roar resounded near me like the smashing sound of an iron hammer. It was a physically explosive sound, which put at a loss for words not just me, but a majority of the people. But that still lasted only an instant.

"That thing there was broken, wasn't it?" "Nah, that was just audio clipping." "Can they actually make that usable in time for the festival?" "I told you, it ain't broken." "I felt my eardrums split here!" "Dear me, what a shock." "It should be installed in a much higher place. Unacceptable."

The speakers that were the source of the sound were set directly on the square's ground. Several young people took the bullhorn speakers, which looked like lily flowers, off somewhere.

All because these were normally not used often, indeed.

"Well, granddaughter-chan, a pleasant day to you."

"Mister director... hello."

I was a little nervous from the appearance of the Boss, which caught me by surprise.

The gentleman, wearing a three-piece suit, just for today was not wearing a hat but a safety helmet.

"Today you are not wearing a hat, I see."

"Right, in a work location like this, a proper gentleman is to use a specially made helmet that embodies the ideal of *Safety First*, that is the correct choice according to gentlemanly studies."

So there was a branch of knowledge like that...

"How is this festival related to that Monument Project?"

"Ah, yes, the People Monument Project. It's as you say, this village will be the forwards base for the investigation of the metropolitan ruins, to which we will be supplying electricity, so we came to supply the village itself with surplus electrical power for a while."

"So even the village will be able to use electricity?"

"To add a few words to that, it will also be without time limits. That's because we have an inexhaustible supply sent from geostationary orbit. Given we actually have power, it'd be a waste to spend it only on the investigation. And that's how we got to sponsoring this, the Come and See the Tingling Electrical Summer Festival. The culture of us primates has nothing else to it but electricity, at this point."

"C-, culture...? This became important, I see."

"It's just for a few days, of course. It's going to make for a reinstatement of civilized life, right, heh heh heh."

"Civilized life..."

Those were words I was extremely grateful for.

I returned my gaze to the activity in the square.

"And that is why we have this much noise."

"Electricity will be coming in a little while, that's why we're giving people time to prepare. This is going to be a big festival. The neighboring lands have also been notified, and we have prepared means to move people even from the more remote places."

The VIP Boss' way of doing things was on a large scale, I see.

"There are in fact many a empty house in this village, meaning there are plenty of locations that can be offered as lodging and as facilities."

"Right, innit? This will be a job to be proud of. We've gathered lots of youngsters, too. They'll be making all the noise they got in them, so, right, I might've you look after them. How about that?"

"Well, I believe that I will be spending all my energies on the investigation, so..."

"Oh, that's right. Granddaughter-chan enjoys the protection of the fairies, I heard. So it's the right thing to add you to the investigation team. Too bad."

It seemed that the VIP Boss found the festival to be far more important than the investigation of the ruins.

"Boo-oss!"

A youngster of the Village came by.

"What is it?"

"The people of the Boys and Girls Science Club have arrived."

"Please lead them over here. I think you believe that I have my mind completely taken by the festival, granddaughter-chan, but as you can see, I'm not forgetting to call over the young people who are going to participate to the investigation."

"Huh..."

After a short while, a party of elderly people came by.

"Where's the boss?"

"Ahhh, sorry, but who were you?"

The representative elder's shook his beard.

"The Boys and Girls Science Club."

It appeared that the boss had called over people who had been youngsters over half a century before.

Work only became more frantic as the sunlight decreased.

The job I was assigned to at present was to look after Grandfather and provide him with everything he needed to go to the investigation. In short, I was to be his gopher.

I provided materials such as the tent to use or the foodstuff to consume, listed out the machinery and the personnel that were required, arranged for lodging and food for those who were to stay in the Village until departure, served as contact for the variety of complaints coming from the village, served as clerk for all sorts of conferences, provided assistance with all sorts of courtesy calls, made and submitted all sort of management lists, served all sorts of tea—

There was a mountain of preparations that needed be done to ensure the investigation would progress without hitches. The terrifying thing was that if I missed a single contact for this job, which involved a large number of people, trouble arose like in chained links. I was a tiny cog that was never allowed rest. It was a seriously tough job.

"oi, how did that thing go?"

Soon as I showed face in the office, this happened.

That thing? This one? Or this other one?

"...there would be about twenty matters to which 'that thing' is potentially applicable, however~."

"I mean the thing about the total number of investigation staff, what else."

"Ah, that... you should have just said it right away."

I searched for the list I had prepared and handed it to Grandfather.

The scale of the investigation was such that several dozen members were participating. They were fully investigating a whole city, and thinking about that, the number was perhaps expectable.

The leader of the investigation team was Grandfather. The way that was decided could have been said to have been rigged in his favor. The main staff attending underneath him were the members of the Boys and Girls Science Club. Seems that they did in fact all have academic degrees.

"I see this will be an investigative team with a high average age. Are you sure this will be all right?"

"Even I'm a newbie among them, but we're taking young assistants with us. One's you."

"This is my first time at an investigation like this."

"It's gonna be good study, worth every effort."

I kind of did not want to do it, though...

"Ah, speaking of studying."

Despite the investigation and the festival both approaching, Assistant-san was doing nothing but reading picture books every day. Even now, when he was stretching himself at his desk, he was right in the middle of silently reading tales that taught morals through the silly daily life of anthropomorphized animals.

The mountain of picture books piled on his desk had been replaced several times in the last few days, and it was impossible to estimate how many hundreds of volumes of fantasy stories he had read through. His character was such that, once ordered to do a job, he would carry it out like nothing else mattered, continuing onwards in his silence until someone stopped him.

In other words, there were plenty of jobs among those I was doing that I could entrust him with. Making a register of names, for example, or processing complaints, or fund raising.

"...are you actually raising funds?"

"And by doing so I am requesting those that possess old, hard currency to provide materials."

"Ahhh, the old coins. Having that as data is all we need, really. Still, it's inefficient."

"But gathering all the data of all the times of all the people is a project that is inefficient to begin with, what about that?"

"...well."

Seems I prodded quite the sore spot, as Grandfather gloomily sunk into silence.

"Therefore, as being unable to do all this is the honest truth, I would like for him to interrupt his study of picture books and come to actually assist me."

"Mh-hm, that's a no."

I believed the proposal to be exceedingly reasonable, but Grandfather waved his hands like the thing was unthinkable.

"Since you have some to do, do some actual hard labor. Alone, and as much as you want. With that, you can see how scary it is to shoulder responsibility, right?"

"But on the actual day of the investigation..."

"Ahhh, of course he'll be participating to the actual investigation. It's just that, before that, there's something I simply need him to learn."

"What do you need him to learn?"

With my sleeve tugged, I noticed that Assistant-san had come to stand close to me.

"..."

"What? You finished reading? Well."

"Oooh, done reading, then. This means you've completed the course as far as picture books and children's stories we have at hand."

"All of them?"

"Mh-hm. We had five hundred volumes or so. Even I was surprised at how fast he reads. As foundation that's a sufficient number, I'd say."

"That many..."

"What is read is engraved on the consciousness, and even if it doesn't lead to quick changes, it will eventually become sustenance and bear fruit, I believe. The cultivation of tastes is for the time being complete."

"Ahhh, so he can assist me?"

"No, he can't."

Grandfather brought about ten volumes of different books from the neighboring rooms, which we used as document repository. All of them were specialized books that looked difficult.

"You will now read these, Assistant-kun."

"But those are...!"

Seeing the titles written on their spines I lost my words.

"Classical information technology for three years old and up", "Understand it! Information Theory", "Understand a Layering Program Module in Sixty Minutes ~Foundations and Practical Use for Building Up a Researcher~", "Starting with COBOL Now ~Learn It and You Will Eat For Your Whole Life~"

"All of these out of nowhere!"

"With his skills at understanding he should be able to read these, at least."

"Besides, why are you making him read this sort of things in the first place?! ...huh?"

That moment I suddenly came to guess Grandfather's intent.

"N-, no way, for the investigation?"

A dangerous shine dwelt in Grandfather's eyes.

"So you noticed..."

"Meaning you want to prepare Assistant-san for the role of information technology expert, correct?"

Classical information technology could have been said to be an exceedingly difficult field. Depending on the era, there had been technological innovations that affected things all the way down to the roots, which made even the way of thinking that people had had until then no longer applicable. Only fragmentary information remained. Investigating the information technology accumulated through the passing generations was tremendously draining. Particularly those of the ancient generations, where investigation became unfeasible. Great informational discontinuities were said to have happened many times in the past. That said, by investigating metropolitan ruins we might be able to recover some of that information that stretched across the generations.

For that goal, specialized knowledge was indispensable, however that was a field completely beyond both me and Grandfather. It appeared that there were experts in the Boys and Girls Science Club, but I have heard that they were very few in numbers given how difficult the field was. It was not like I could not altogether understand the feelings of wanting Assistant-san, who still preserved the learning powers of youth, to specialize in that field.

"Regardless, there is a limit even to this sort of half-measures."

"Well, that's how it is. Though I think it'll be a nice plus for him."

"But it would be a necessary skill for an explorer..."

Imagining Assistant-san with a whip at his waist, working hard in his job of explorer with the spectacular background of dangerous city ruins, was a mistake.

"Still, it's a good opportunity. He can also have even more direct contact with other researchers, I'd say. He himself's gonna go at that pace, so how about I just help him get there?"

"Well, I do hope there is anything to be gained from an interexchange with those musty old professors."

Grandfather put his hands on the windowsill, and said this while looking somewhere in the distance.

"This is a non-starter."

"...that is an irresponsible thing to say."

It looked like the days in which I will be working hard and all alone were going to continue.

A bundle of just-mimeographed contact sheets in my arms, I was cheerfully headed for the public building that had been opened for the ruins investigation group when, partway through, a fairy called to me.

"Hellooo?"

"My, good morning, fairy."

"Can I have a consultation?"

Standing on top of the stone wall that separated the grazing lands from the road was a single fairy.

He had a somewhat laudable attitude in how he lowered his head in quite the fearful way, which was cute and made the mood to play rush through me, but I was in the middle of work at present.

"I am sorry. Some other time."

I took out a one cubic centimeter small-sized milk candy from my pocket and handed it to him.
"....."

Although he did accept it, there was no real response, and he looked up at me with a 'bwhat?'. Emotion did not really come to the faces of these people (I always saw them with smiles, but in truth that had to be their normal expression).

"...I am sorry."

It bothered me a little, but work took priority. I decided to caress his head with a fingertip and to hurry along the road.

After walking for a brief while I looked back to where the fairy had been, and he had already vanished.

"Next time, all right, next time."

There was only the tiny prickle of a sense of guilt.

"I am so tired."

Several days later I was swamped with urgent communications and other miscellaneous work, and I only managed to finally finish those jobs at seven after noon. The scene I could see from the office window had already darkened away.

"Right, it is somewhat dark outside... I had not noticed..."

Running around as a messenger, it was a stare-down with the documents in the Office. My head had been constantly immersed in this without even the time to spare to enjoy a cup of tea, and next thing I noticed, this was the hour it was.

Thinking back, these last few days have felt similar. No matter how much I filed away the jobs did not end, consequently the time when I returned home was delayed by an hour a day. Still, it was the first time I have been doing nothing but work until evening without tea breaks.

When I came home, it was time for dinner. I was hesitant about what to do.

"...no, let us brew some now. That is what I should do."

Left like this it would feel like I was going to go home defeated. I decided to have one cup before returning.

"Grandfather... is not here, then."

He seemed to have been made quite busy by all this, and throughout the day he was nearly never in the office. Today our plans were to go home directly, I would say.

My head feeling leaden and heavy was due to blood sugar running dry, no mistake.

"Let us have it with some jam..."

Strawberry jam: that was one of the foods that laid within the realm of God. I loved strawberries. I liked putting them on sweets, I liked making them into jam and sauce, I liked

eating them as they were. It was a forbidden fruit that I would use as much as I had.
Flip...

And here my sense of hearing at last allowed me to hear the sound of pages being turned. Assistant-san was at his desk, completely absorbed in his reading. He had been reading those torturous specialized books all this time. Retracing my memories, I had a feeling that I had spotted him there every time I had come to the Office.

Now that I thought of it, I still had not had a proper conversation with him.

When conversing with people you are not close to, do the screws that hold your presence of mind not occasionally fly right off from the excess of stress? The turbines of the heart revolved at full power, rather, and a sensation came like one could not control oneself. When talking the more we talk the more these problems come to the surface, informing me that this turbine had become the motor of a device that piles shame over shame, to call it...

"Say, would you like some tea?"

For some reason, Assistant-san was the only person that I could interact with without that stress. It was to be thankful for.

"....."

Eyes just a teensy bit muddy looked up at me.

Ah, he was tired.

I understood. Although it almost did not show on his face, fatigue was definitely accumulating in his body like sediment. His mood was such that he seemed to have dark rainy clouds hanging on his eyelids.

"Y-, you know... I think you should have taken a break, do you?"

Though he should have rested by himself when he was tired, he seems to have continued to do as he was ordered in silence. He wobbled over and flopped on a chair at the tea table.

"It is quite nice to drink it with some jam. If you do not really like it, you can have the cream here."

"....."

Assistant-san hesitated a little, then scooped up a mountain from both bottles, and dropped walnut-sized lumps of each of them into his cup without hesitation.

"Do you like it like that?"

"..."

He carried that cup with that likely very rich flavor to his mouth, then exhaled satisfied.

"We only have the leftover scones from this morning as teacakes."

There was enough for Grandfather, as well, so exactly six scones had remained. We decided to split them three each. It was not like I did not think that they were a few too many to put in the belly right before dinner, but being that the synergy between fatigue and empty stomach was immense, the two of us flattened them in an instant.

"And still, it does not really feel like I have returned back to life..."

"..."

Fatigue was a deep thing indeed.

"Let us go home. Before that--"

I was going to give our farewell to the fairies, so my hands went for the hand bell, when...

"Well now?"

The handle-type fairy was not there. The fairies that had attached (?) themselves as they pleased in various spots around the room had also disappeared.

"Did they all leave?"

Assistant-san shook his head side by side, saying he did not know.

"What could have happened..."

Given that they were creatures of whim, they would show themselves again when least expected. And as many in number as there were.

That was what I was thinking at the time.

The job of mediation between humans, which I was not accustomed to, finally saw a prospective end several days later.

"...making an organization function is truly hard work, indeed."

I felt more and more the truth that supported that.

What remained was just about to supervise things to ensure they were continuing according to the plan. If pressed to say it, this was where the real thing started, but my assignments had reached a stopping point. At that stage, what really bothered me was the fairies, who had disappeared.

"..."

Assistant-san tugged at my sleeves. When I looked at him I saw his looks had him wearing a hat.

"Want to go searching for them?"

A nod shook his chestnut forelocks.

I had a feeling like his cultivation of taste had had an effect.

"Our main business would be with them, indeed. Understood, let us try searching around the empty lots in that area."

When I said that, Assistant-san equipped a bug-catching net and an insect bucket.

"...are you going to use a butterfly net on your friends?"

He only tilted his head, as if asking what could the problem be.

The fairies were not beings that would necessarily be in a single defined place. There was a possibility they would appear in any place. As far as trends, they appeared in places with few humans and in places that looked fun, that was about it. Therefore, searching around randomly as the mood took us was actually the correct way.

"Were there any?"

Assistant-san said with gestures that there were none.

Normally some would appear right away, though...

Several days ago I did get asked for a consultation by a fairy. I was busy so I refused, but it might have been that it was about something very important.

"That may have been a mistake, perhaps... but I was busy... I could not tell that it was so important... and you see..."

I was fence-sitting (a specialty of mine).

Assistant-san was lost in catching insects like grasshoppers, and was no longer fit for this fight.

"Hummm, what is all this about, then..."

A sound of construction that normally would never be heard reached even this place distant from the Village. There was the sound of struck metal and the sound of wheeled vehicles, and it seemed they were even using that terrifying tool that was the chainsaw. At times I heard distant laughter. Like at a banquet.

A large crowd of people I did not know had gathered and was performing a major job.

Everybody seemed to be elated by that. Power supply had already partially begun, and even when night had fallen, construction was continuing via abundant usage of illumination. It was

like a different world.

"Master humaaan!"

"Ah! Fairies!"

A large crowd of fairies had gathered at our feet.

"Now just what happened with you? Uhm... and what are those bags for?"

They were all shouldering cloth wrappers. I thought they were baggage for a voyage, but no matter how hard I looked at them, this did not seem like a friendly departure. They felt like they were running away from home, or escaping during the night, something of that sort.

"We have a sad notice to give!"

The fairy at the head of the group said this without a particularly sad face.

"Huh?"

"We've come to give you our farewell!"

"Give us your farewell? Like you were leaving?"

"...?"

Assistant-san also came by, looking worried.

"We are leaving, you see?"

"Leaving? Why?"

"...that thing is coming!"

"That thing?"

"The EM wave thing!"

Electromagnetic waves...

"By EM wave, you do mean those EM waves, perhaps?"

"Yes, EM waves!"

The fairy shuddered visibly.

"When... when... those things... come...!"

"Do you dislike electromagnetic waves?"

"We can't live with them, you see?"

I saw the shadow of death peek out in here.

"What does that mean? Does something bad happen to you when you bathe in electromagnetic waves?"

"Sort of like that!" "The thing comes!" "Light and that we are fine with, though!" "We can't stand in an electromagnetic field!" "Impossible, totally impossible!" "It will mess us all up!"

"And make us nearly insane!" "We'll lose the strength we need to live!" "It will bring so much sadness!" "Whatta problem!" "And so!" "We gotta run?"

Bathed by electromagnetic waves they will die. Was that why they were running?

"Would that..."

I did not know much in detail, but there was just one thing that remained to my memories.

"Is it this?"

I stuck out three fingers (thumb / index / middle) of my left hand and made the form of one axis with each of them. This was called Fleming's Left Hand Rule. I was sure that this was the shape that showed where motion and electric field were directed when electricity flowed though. I heard it was called such because Fleming-san had the superpower to emit magnetic fields from his left hand.

"Ah, is that!"

Seeing the shape of my left hand, the fairy happily stood on his toes.

"Rap music?"

"Seriously, it is nothing of the sort!"

Pointing the left hand rule at the ground made for a replica of a pose of an old type of music, rap.

"Yo yo?"

"Yes?"

"Yo yo, hyo man?"

"...yes, what is it?"

"It's rap! Yo-say? Fay-ray!"

"That came out of nowhere..."

The fairies looked ready to shift into dancing, but all of a sudden regained their senses and stretched themselves.

"...this is farewell!"

"Are you really going away?"

"Aye."

"But where to?"

"Who knows?"

As I thought, they did not know...

"But you are coming back once the electromagnetic waves have vanished, right?"

"Will we?" "Well, we are kind of existing somehow!" "We might forget!" "It sort of is like, we exist in the space between reality and dream!" "We're fantasy!"

The fairies themselves were talking without a care, but I was becoming uneasy.

"Say... is this thing going on really that serious an issue?"

"That's still!" "Still!" "When the illumination comes to the she-tee (city)..." "It's gonna shine nice and sparkly forever!" "And we can't come out, see?"

"This is about the matter of the investigation of the metropolitan ruins, right."

They were supplying power for the investigation. The powerful flow of electricity was going to power things up in the city, and countless electrical devices that had been in a state of rest would revive—

Electromagnetic waves were going to extend to the surrounding space, and thus the fairies would no longer be able to live there.

The supply of electricity for the investigation would, depending on the results, be prolonged by a time measurable in years. The People Monument Project was a job that had no need for hurry, nor did it have a delivery date.

And then, should even this land in which they had not dwelt for a long period of time return to how it was, the whimsical fairies would never return, just like a wave never does.

"Come now, really, you should have consulted me much earlier..."

"We tried, but we couldn't!"

That was true.

I prioritized my job... an utter mistake. No matter how much in a hurry I was, I was never to forget that I was a Mediator.

"Could you wait a little while? I will prepare a shelter for you."

"Will it be a fun disaster drill?"

"If a disaster drill was fun it would be bad... no, not that, I mean a real shelter."

"Ahhh..."

The fairies faced each other. However,

"But the thing is already coming."

That was correct, the preliminary power supply—

Power distribution had begun for the preparations to the investigation and the festival.

"This much is the limit!" "We just gotta go!" "I feel all tingly!" "Really makes your skin itch!"
"We're so afraid of it!" "When the real deal comes it will be very bad!"

"When the investigation finishes,"

I could not come up with words.

Whatever it was, anything that went from here onwards was nothing more than wishful thinking.

"...!"

Assistant-san's worried gaze made the rounds of the space between the fairies and I. This was as it always was, still he had no words to speak.

"I have advice!"

With the exact same feeling of when they come up with their silly little questions, the leader fairy raised his hand.

"Advice?"

"After we're gone!" "Wounds!" "Disease!" "Disasters!" "Jumping off!" "Watch out!" "For all those things!"

"...what do you mean?"

"There's no time, so," and the fairy offered me a miniature book. "Take the manual, please."
A different fairy was holding a pendant that seemed to be made from weaved paper.



2

2 The text on the book reads 'Manual'.

"A good luck charm for you, please."

"A good luck charm..."

I certainly accepted them, but I could not sincerely be happy about any of this. Were these things farewell presents? It felt like a joke.

I could not accept them. Even if my head could understand it, my heart remained noisy. My two sides, unable to compromise, were too much for me to handle.

"Ahhh!"

The scream rushed out from all the mouths of the fairies.

"It's here!" "So it came!" "Really!" "Sooo sluggish..." "EM waves just can't read the mood, can they?" "That stuff will stop pacemakers!" "It will switch them off!" "This is nearly switching us off too!" "Let's run!" "Run! Run!"

From the fairies' tone of voice they seemed to be unable to bear this. The slightly off way in which they phrased things made it impossible to get along with them with the smiles of always.

"Au revoir!"

Hop, and with a flea-like leap, he disappeared as if melting into the air.

"Alohan!" "Tsee tyou tagain!" "Say'nara!"

Leaving each behind a farewell, they did the same and vanished on the far side of the grass. When all had vanished, the air of early Summer was especially chilly on the skin.

"...!"

Assistant-san was restlessly fidgeting.

Though I was as still as a sculpture, inside I was no less shaken than he was.

And for all that – ahhh, that was how it was.

The fairies had evacuated.

And perhaps not just their group, but all the ones living around the Village... if we were to call the fairies' abrupt dispersals as daydreams, this event, the carelessness of which in part resided with me, could not be called anything less than a nightmare.

"...how am I even going to report this."

This was an event that had everybody excited, it did not seem likely that they would stop the power supply just because I reported this.

The lingering scent of a dream remained only in the miniature book and good luck charm left in my hands.

"...?" Moist eyes asked me.

"What? What is this book about? Let us have a look. Maybe there is a recipe for how to make new fairies printed in it."

No there isn't, went Assistant-san as he waved his hand. Well, even I, with half of my soul taken out, would say something silly every once in a while.

The Fairy Manual was far too tiny and extremely difficult to read. Using the magnifying glass attached to the compass I carried it with me I scrupulously followed the characters.

It went something like this.

[How to Read This Book]

Please choose the person in the area who is most intimate with the fairies. Measuring the number of fairies that come visit them in one day it is possible to approximate Fairy Density (the fairy version of population density).

The measurement unit used is f (Fairy).

For example, 1f means an environment where generally one fairy is met every day.

As the number of fairies increases there is a tendency to have deficiencies induced in their stringency, making the calculation meaningless. Because of that, the figure has a highest limit of $15f$, and the crowded situation that emerges beyond that is indicated with F .

"...?"

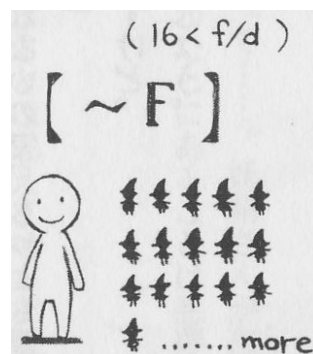
"In short, you see, because it is not quite possible to count how many fairies there are in an area, you use the human most intimate with them as counter and can come out with an estimate."

The problem was how to conclude that once the density of fairies was estimated.

Things were referenced in detail for each numerical value, but that very fundamental part alone was excluded.

[~F]

Explanation



It's full of fairies, it's chock full of fairies, it's smeared with fairies, this situation.

On the opposite side of extreme danger lies extreme safety.

You will be met with great misfortune.

But be at ease, because you will first of all not die.

Example situations (approximation)

Fall from a twenty story building → survival rate is extremely high. You will be caught by a superhero in midair. Or maybe saved by a flying animal, things like these. To increase the rate of survival, if you spot Pegasus early on, tame him.

Gunshot at close range → your precious pendant will stop the bullet.

Attack by a man-eating monster → a giant rock or similar will fall on top of the monster.

Survival will be certain.

Final battle with your rival → you will awaken to your hidden power. You will win. In case the rival is a blood relative, the opponent will die. There are no ways to help him, so give it up.

I decided not to delve too deeply into these extremely ridiculous example situations.

"...why will you not die?"

I tried flipping around the book, but there was no explanation for that.

Given these writings, I could also conclude that the rate of occurrence of trouble when fairies were saturating the environment was extremely high.

The part that said you were certain not to die was of unclear meaning.

Some sort of reaction might perhaps be manipulating the law of consequences.

[10f~]

Explanation

Even in a situation where a moderate number of fairies is present, confusion and safety are predicted to conform to the previous heading, [~F].

The rate of occurring problems will be the only thing restrained due to the lowered number of fairies.

However, the safety aspect isn't a given, so bear in mind the saying, *attention is for a second, injuries are for life*.

Example situations

Fall from a twenty story building → fundamentally you will survive, but should the preparations made beforehand, such as saving Pegasus from a bear trap, be insufficient, depending on the situation you could meet with a dark literary or mythological conclusion such as the virtual manifestation of the god "Hit!" turning you into a bird or a constellation with a reason such as *it would be too sad for you to fall and die like this*.

Gunshot at close range → it is possible that a person that has feelings for you will become your shield and die.

Involved in family inheritance-related troubles (by the way murders may occur) → it's crucial to not be overly attached to the inheritance. By appealing to your virtuous poverty to the detective who's come to investigate, and telling him you don't need any money, you will be granted the blessing of the tales of success of all last children as found in folkloristics.

Attack by a man-eating monster → after being eaten, you will encounter an old man who has been unable to escape from within the man-eating monster for over a decade, and there is the possibility that a new adventure will begin.

"...reading this kind of writing at a time as serious as this sort of hurts, indeed."

"..."

Assistant-san showed me his moist eyes as if to comfort me.

[5f~]

Explanation

You will be placed in situations that feel realistic.

When met with danger it's possible you will be injured, and depending on the situation it may be possible you will lose your life.

It's however certain that even with a fairly low figure such as 5f or higher your survival rate will be increased. By consistently acting with a cool head you will be able to overcome all difficulties.

Example situations

Fall from a twenty story building → this is a tough situation. To escape from this danger, please immediately fire off a grappling gun. If you are able to do that, you will without fail hook onto something with a miraculous level of firmness. There is another somewhat tough way, which is the drastic move of awakening to a hidden power while falling. If you are a young girl, it's recommended to possess meaningful rings or pendants.

Chased around by a mysterious person → you will have to run away for a long time. However,

in the end you should be able to use your quick wit and repel him. It's possible the opponent possesses a chainsaw or claws, so please do your best to survive. This should not be a situation as desperate as the impression it leaves. That said, in case you are a misbehaving youth, the probability of death jumps upwards. Please be mindful of your behavior.
Final battle with your rival → this will end in a real and proper draw. That's a beautiful conclusion for its own, but those who hold their lives dear should please be careful.

"I just have more and more things I would like to say at this point..."

I did not understand what generation this manual has been written for, but, well, it had been penned by human hands. And the fairies discovered it and miniaturized it. As their own service manual.

That the existence of fairies was altogether nonsensical was understood.

For 5f and below the difference in precision of effect seemingly becomes more accurate, as they were explained for each individual figure.

I skimmed partway through and ran down the description for 1f.

[1f~]

Explanation

In this situation there is nothing but a single fairy.

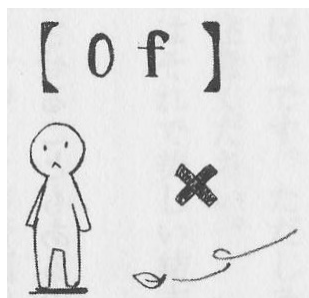
You might think that there is no difference between that and reality.

That estimate could be said to be halfway true. In truth, the figure of death easily peeks in when in this situation. You might lose your life due to normal causes of death. The world of 1f and below is extremely realistic. This is not a time when you are able to have dreams tinged with tales and adorned with elegant turns of the phrase.

Though there is only one fairy, do not throw away your hope. Please, whatever else, set your goals not on a tragic but on a comedic course. It is predicted that this will end in overabuse of your physical body, but just get through it. This is not the time to chuckle and change direction. It's time to continue through with the determination of the initial period. For example, if you obtain a rusty sword, it's not to be discarded without reason. Through those hard struggles these Children's Tale-Like Disasters may, through the actions of the Foreshadowing Effect, turn the situation into a plus for you. We reluctantly omit example situations.

[0f]

Explanation



This is the cold and harsh reality. The world in which we live.

What is to happen will happen.

Please watch out for accidents and diseases as you do your best to live your normal lifespan

to its end.

Example situations

Fall from a twenty story building → you will smash into the ground.

Gunshot at close range → you will die.

Attack by a man-eating monster → you will be eaten.

Final battle with your rival → you will lose.

I closed the book.

"...well now, seriously."

I felt like I understood the reason why Earth had transformed into something mysterious (though this may be limited to the areas in my vicinity).

Whatever preposterous mechanism was controlling the world, at present Earth people lacked the right to stop the fairies' way of thinking. Rather, if I had to say it—

The sound of air vibrating reached me from far in the distance.

Where Assistant-san was pointing at there were fireworks being launched into the air. The pleasant sound of prosperous times shook the blue sky.

"...?"

"These are the fireworks used for the opening ceremony of a festival. Those specifically have been fired as rehearsal."

The real ones were going to be on the day after tomorrow. According to schedule, the beginning of the investigation and of the electrical festival were being enacted at the same time.

That was an event that everybody in the village was eagerly waiting for with high spirits. This was the beginning of the noise of a festival that was going to continue for several days, a once in a lifetime event that allowed one to see in translucency the afterimage of the olden days of Civilization.

I could say all sort of things, but I too was looking forwards to it. I had become a workhorse and prepared myself for this big, big job. I did pride myself in having done that.

"...hmmm?"

I even wondered if, alongside with the fairies vanishing into the grass, my own happiness had also ran away.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is what you have been waiting so very long for. Please, come closer and enjoy a drink. Are you all done? Then we declare this Come and See the Tingling Electrical Summer Festival as begun!"

Soon as the Boss' announcement was done, a massive cheer exploded in the square.

At long last the electrical festival had begun.

For all that, what a number of people we had.

In the beginning I worried that this would be a festival that only gathered old people, but as soon as the lid was lifted, this was how things were. People, people, people, a massive crowd of people. Of course they were not only the people of the village. It was chock full of people who had been visiting from other lands.

There were rows of stalls for cigarettes and alcoholics and food, which were handed to the people demanding them as if they were poured on them. People were not only gathering there, there was a flow of items bucket-brigaded from these stalls, forming a spiral vector within the square.

"Excuse me, please let me pass... let me pass... aAuWaaah?!"

Though I had only been slightly touched by the outer edge of the whirlpool, I was caught by the merciless and filthy flow of people and came to be dragged in towards the center.

"I-, I cannot leave?!"

There was no space to fit a needle, it was an extremely crowded area.

Besides, as I had to participate to the investigation, I was only passing past the square and stopping by my home in the first place.

And the next thing I noticed was that I was made to hold a drink and a hot dog.

"No, well, I would just like to leave..."

My insistence hollowly vanished into the wild enthusiasm of the square, a proper replica of eras in which chaos reigned.

"It's said that once, humans prospered in the heavens, in the earth, and at sea. And so they supported an advanced culture of cities... that was the magnificent power of electricity. Until now, nothing but a tiny remnant of that science remained to us. However, the end of that perseverance has come. The power of electricity has been restored. We would like to pray, not just for the blessing of the people of Kusunoki Village, who are the first to receive this grace from the UNESCO, but also so that the old age of us primates can be one of abundance—"

And once again there were loud voices and an explosive applause.

"Bwah..."

I had to cup my ears as I was nothing less than overwhelmed.

"Now then, the supply of electricity will begin. My dear people, we leave it in your care."

The engineers on the stage activated something in the machinery. The microwave electric supply network activated, and all around the square the decorations hung about as well as the electrical appliances simultaneously began activating. Monitors emitted light, washing machines spun empty, cooking utensils shuddered, cleaning machines leaped about, electric toys groaned...

"T-, this is much too creepy, is it not?"

Never would I have thought that mechanical motions linking without a meaning would give me this uncomfortable an impression. It was like avant-garde art. That said, the people in the square seemed to be uninfluenced by that specific nuance. Rather, they shouted as they vigorously washed their throats with the alcoholics they had in hand.

"I-, it is just a party, this thing."

And it will also last for several days. Just imagining that I felt mentally fatigued.

"I ought run away."

Weaving in the gaps between the crowds I somehow managed to escape to the edge of the maelstrom, however that was where I exhausted my strength.

"...I am done."

Should I slump down in this place I might be trampled down and die. I was going to return to the earth far too early, how unfortunate for me. And as I was shrinking into myself with that sort of lines, a sheep trampled my back as it passed past.

"Nggh..."

It was Assistant-san who pulled me to standing as I was about to vanish into myself.

"..."

On top of being obedient and affectionate, he had the peculiar gift of not receiving pressure from the people he faced, a marvelous talent. He spotted me at just the right time.

"Good work, Assistant-san... I so want to give you a prize."

"..."

The two of us went away from the square, walking the road back in the opposite direction.

Once distanced from the crowd, my mood also heightened somewhat.

Even in the main road of the Village there were stalls lined in rows, and although it was not to the extent that it was in the square, a crowd of people was still going back and forth. That said, what bothered me more than anything was the warm scent of food that lightly drifted our way.

"Assistant-san, all these foods are free. We can just go to whatever place we desire."

As he nodded with a pair of bobs, I found that he had basil already stuck to his lips.

We promptly approached a nearby stall and shared a food that was a thin core of chocolate mousse sandwiched between waffles.

"This is delicious!"

I had the feeling that there were many sweets that I did not know about. They were time limited. I was run through by the urge to take a break from the investigation and do nothing but go around the stalls. Although I was not thinking that seriously, I made my line of sight quickly run around the street... and it stopped on a solitary girl.

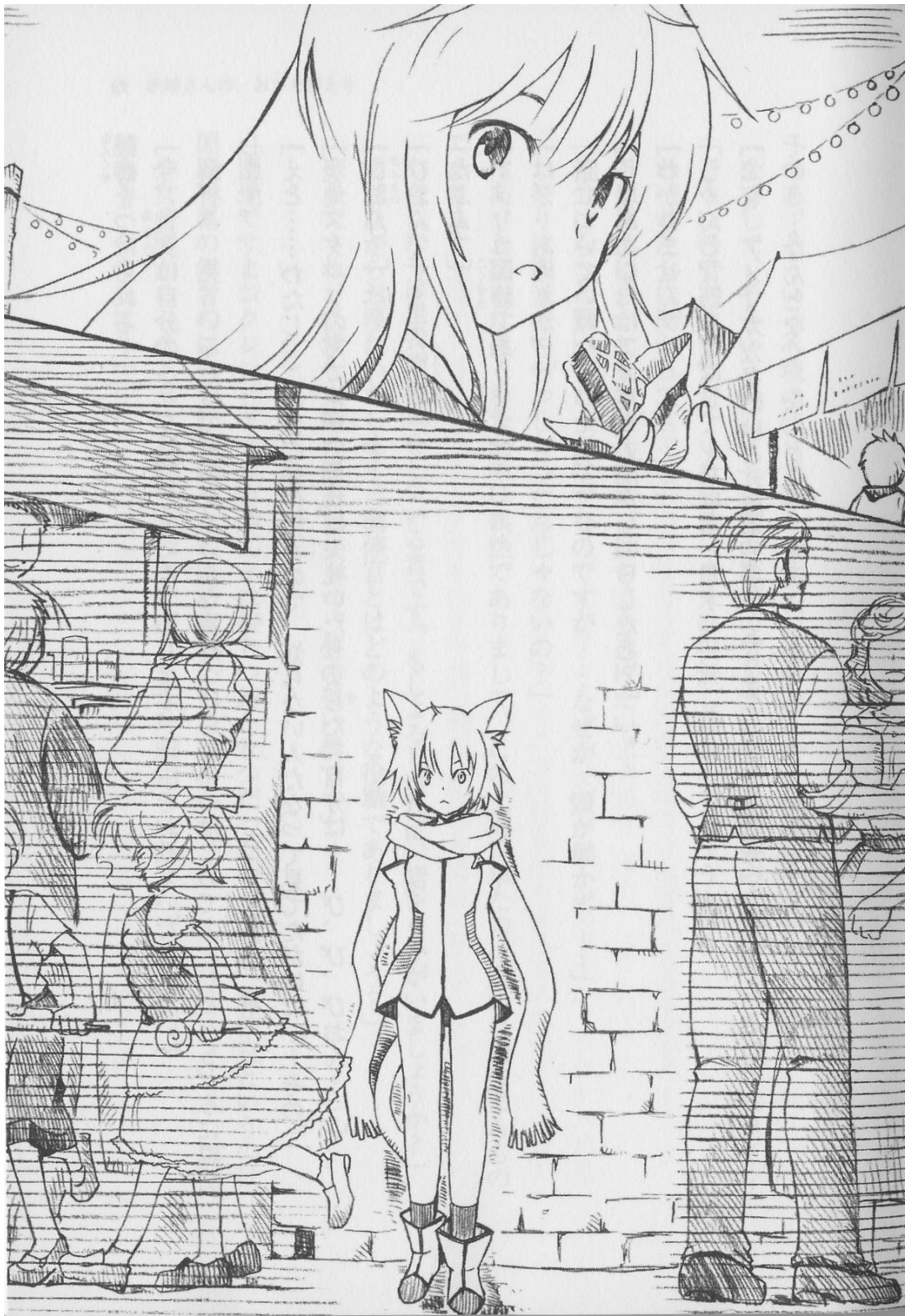
Age was in between twelve to fifteen years old. She was wearing odd clothes.

By odd clothes I mainly indicated the cat ears.

While the young lady was a human, she also had cat ears growing straight out of her head. I for some reason found myself unable to tolerate that.

I looked for other characteristics, and found she had soot all over her, rather, she was somewhat filthy. Still, I did not see her as doing hard work, she had her almond-shaped cat eyes glitzy open, her mouth drawn tightly close, and was observing her surroundings only by mechanically moving her head.

With her back to a wall the motions of her head covered a 180° angle, and the way she focused her attention on the people passing by was like a human radar.



When seeing someone behaving more suspiciously than yourself, do you not come to feel relieved? You do not, I understand. Well, that is inconsequential, however. I was giving her a gaze full of smiling feelings, but the person herself traced that gaze back to me.

"Whoops..."

Her gaze fixed onto me. I was being stared back quite intensely. It was a glare. By the time I took my eyes off her it was already too late, I could feel the girl rapidly walking closer to me.

W-, was she going to complain to me?

"You were analyzing me just a moment ago. I would like you to explain the reason why."

Analyzing? An analysis from just looking? This is the first time I received a complaint like this! The explanation was incoherent.

"Well... I am a native of this village, and I only looked at you because you were someone I truly did not know, that is all... uhm..."

"So you are the local staff. That was rude of you. I am P-, P-, Pyon..."

"Pyon?"

"I am Pyon... maybe."

"Maybe?"

"I'm an American."

"Huh? America?"

I was unable to follow along the conversation.

"Then you have come from the American continent?"

"I don't know."

The girl said that straightening her back with dignity.

"Regardless, I'm certain that I'm an American. That remains still in my records... well... sort of. It is only sort of, but it's certainly so."

Ahhh, there were times when one had that sort of mind, indeed. One suddenly felt sure that something was true for some reason, that was how it went.

"In the end, however, it is precisely at times like those that one commits regrettable misunderstandings."

"Is it truly like that? Am I then a person without any roots?"

"Wah... you can ask me, but..."

This young lady was even stranger than I predicted. I wanted to hurry up and run away.

"I believed that I was a much smarter girl, however... for some reason I cannot get my head to work..."

"Did you not come here as a tourist for the festival?"

"Huh, it is a coincidence that I found this festival, I have come to this land with a different goal."

"We are the people working as Mediators in this Village. If you wish it, we could perhaps speak?"

"By your permission I will then inquire. What sort of official position does Mediator occupy?"

"Right, that, we act as intermediary between the fairies and humans, we are the suspension bridge of dreams."

"....."

"We are from the UN, indeed, the Ew-En. It should be interdependent with America? A Mediator is something like one end of the scholars affiliated with the United Nations."

A loud 'ding!' sound came from the girl's head.

"Huh? What was that?"

"So you are from the United Nations! A log regarding that organization remains even in my records!"

"Mh? Did something happen to your memories?"

"It did. Truth is, I am at present in a state of records loss."

Assistant-san and I met faces.

"What you are speaking of is actually memory loss, right?"

"There's no hindrance in calling it like that."

"...this seems to be a very serious situation."

If she has lost her memories, I could understand why the conversation so far has been incoherent.

"Fortunately I'm equipped with a self-restoration functionality, so time will solve everything."

"Do you mean 'powers of recovery'?"

"There's no hindrance in calling it like that."

This young lady in the shape of a human gave me the sense that something was off.

"So, you do not know yourself why you are here, either?"

"No, I have not lost sight of my objective, at least. I am searching for a colleague."

"And this colleague, where are they?"

She lowered her eyes in discomfort, and at the same time her cat ears also bent downwards.

I let out a groan.

"T-, they moved..."

"Huh?"

"Nothing, individuals are free to do as they please, indeed..."

Besides attaching cat ears, she made them move with a device that used piano wire or something and... free!, she was free to do as she pleased!

Even as she was a little puzzled at my baring my internal discord, the young lady began talking.

"Normally, as long as we are in a shared environment we should be able to establish a data link without issues, but the signal has ceased. This cessation has unknown origins. For that, a direct connection is required and thus you see me standing in this road performing surveillance."

"Huh-huh, I understand your situation... so, this colleague of yours, what sort of person are they?"

"That person is... o-, o-, oyaji..."

"Huh?"

"Maybe he's called 'Oyaji'."

Like 'old man' in Japanese?

"....."

Silence visited us.

"S-, so I see. Well, it is all right. You are free to do as you please. America is a free country, after all."

Sovereign nations banzai.

"Then, your excellencies Mediators, regarding this matter, is there any useful data that you can give me?"

This was sooo the first time I was called 'your excellency'! (I enjoyed it a little.)

"...no, sad to say."

"I see... that's regrettable. I will parallelize my self-diagnosis and make the investigation intermittent. If there's anything, do make sure to report it to me."

"We shall do so."

Memory loss was quite the serious thing, indeed.

"I will now excuse myself."

She put her heels into a bow, turned back, and returned to her previous position.

Assistant-san soon tugged my sleeve.

"Yes?"

On his sketchbook, the illustration of cat ears had been drawn without a moment's hesitation.

"...yes, I do understand. You cannot prod into things like those, not at all... so scary."

So they bothered Assistant-san as well, I see.

"Let us pretend not to have seen. Things like these are going to happen at a festival, without doubt."

"Did you do something again?"

"F'wYAH!"

Grandfather, clad not in his usual white lab coat but with expeditionary looks, was standing right behind me.

"It's time to depart and you just weren't coming back, so I come to search for you... and here you are, taking Assistant-kun with you, doing nothing but playing around, right?"

"Well, I was on the way back, but..."

"We're moving by car so hurry up. There's not much time left."

"Of course... uhm, by the way, Grandfather."

"Mh?"

"If I say a mister 'Oyaji', can you tell who it is?"

"That word could also mean one's father, what about it?"

Father?

That did not link at all, it felt.

"I would just have another question, naming a young lady 'Pyon', what do you think?"

"Makes my heart hurt."

"It does indeed."

"Now, seriously, what the hell's all this about?"

"It is nothing particularly important, but... I will go change."

"Don't forget your bags, either. Assistant-kun's, also. I'm going ahead to the assembly location, so once you're done making ready come by, and don't stop on the way."

My esteemed Grandfather was in an odd hustle as Assistant-san returned him a wordless bow.

A group of large-sized vehicles, loaded with plenty of equipment and personnel, was running down the whole width of the rough road.

This could be called nothing less than a magnificent spectacle. As a result of gathering a variety of fuel-free vehicles equipped with microwave electricity receptor units, this was a mixed party of trucks / buses / private cars / mobile cranes / special wheeled vehicles and more. The one we were riding was a large bus for civilian sightseeing. As the road was in poor condition, we swayed and oh yes we swayed. That was fast and that oh yes was fast. High speed motion without using fuel was made possible by electrical supply. Reaching the majority of the metropolitan ruins, located several days of walking away, was now a voyage of a mere six hours. We could call this a major difference with comparison even to the caravan, which, when things went bad, was slower than even walking.

That, however... only went if one could withstand the nightmarishly unpleasant ride.

"Ngggh."

Though I was made to sit at a window seat, my displeasure was in the midst of mounting rapidly.

"..."

"What? You are asking if I am all right? No, I am not, I am going to die."

"...! (bewildered)"

The only one who was worried about me was Assistant-san, who was sitting next to me. With Grandfather at the head, the people of the Boys and Girls Science Club were having a pleasant conversation.

"Wind, I want to feel the wind..."

I opened the window and cold air flowed in. Fresh air feels so good. I was about to instinctively lean out, but Assistant-san pulled me back from behind.

"..."

"What? Leaning out is dangerous? But not leaning out is dangerous in a different sense."

I at least put my chin alone on the window frame and,

"The king has donkey ears and the inside of the bus smells like a felt-tip pen~."

I tried letting out my complaints as I watched the scene.

"..."

All along I was being pulled back from behind.

"We have arrived..."

I descended from the bus and lowered my posterior to my beloved ground, working hard to recover my sense of equilibrium.

"If I had a full belly, this would be where the food would make its return."

"So one of the younger persons is the most worn out."

Grandfather looked in good health.

"I was the foremost in doing my best and keep up the fight within the vehicle, so could you please give me a break about that."

"What does she mean?," he inquired with Assistant-san.

"..."

"What? She deserves the Fighting Spirit prize?"

Indeed, I had some fighting spirit.

"In short, she was carsick."

"I am just done..."

Even now, if I dropped my guard, a ripple of movement would come from the Flow Emission Device at the bottom of my throat. However I absolutely needed to put a stop to that trend.

"But you weren't carsick in the caravan?"

"It had a milder climate of speed and shaking..."

"Nothing to be done. We're heading for the preliminary investigation right away, but you two rest here. Can you read the map? You just need to join us here once you feel better."

"Yes, I will do so."

I was still crawling on all fours as I escaped into one of the tents that somebody somewhere had erected. For now I just wanted to lay on my back. The large tent, which could house around eight sleepers without problems, had already several people's worth of mattresses laid out. I took over one and stretched my limbs when from outside the tent came the sounds of the scholars attempting a Great Migration.

Everybody was so high in spirits, were they...

Seeing them off in my heart, I yielded my body to a shallow sleep—

I slept for about an hour, I believed.

Whatever it was, it seemed that my sense of equilibrium had been rectified, and I managed to recover without problems. I left the tent and found that the silence of a deserted investigation camp clung to my skin.

The tents had been set up haphazardly, the condition that of a nomadic settlement. A number of measurement devices were set down on foldable desks. Bundles of electrical wires snaked around the ground. The heavy machinery that was being carried on top of the trailer was still in standby, waiting for its time to come.

"Astounding, they even have a fridge."

And one for business use, at that. Inside – meat, fish, eggs, vegetables, alcoholics.

That made me predict the dawn of an age of plentiful food. The amount of alcoholic drinks let me clearly hypothesize a party.

And there, from somewhere in this forest of tents (it truly felt like one) I spotted white smoke rising upwards. In the sort of spacious remaining area Assistant-san was using a portable stove to boil water, and that was its cause. He pointed at me drowsy, carefree eyes.

"..."

"What? It is tea time, you say? I thank you for that, I will have some."

The unsophisticated scent of the plain tea I was handed tickled my nose.

I took plenty of time to enjoy my cup.

"Now then, let us head towards the metropolitan ruins. Put this heavy thing on your shoulders."

Fully loaded with shouldered bags for two people, we wore a number of items.

Main ones were food and water, the portable type stove, the survival kit and the medicines, the knife and pocket flashlights and other various tools, and just a spare change of clothes or so. In particular regarding food we had for a week or more, regarding water we had an exaggerated four liters (among which a liter was in a canteen), that was how much we were carrying.

Most importantly, this extreme amount of water was also for use with hand-made tea bags of wrapped cloth filled with tea leaves or coffee powder.

...if I had not heeded the fairies' warning, I would never have thought of carrying a bag this heavy with me. I just had a bad feeling about all of this.

From this somewhat tall hill on which the camp had been installed one could have an unbroken, sweeping view of the aforementioned metropolitan ruins.

There were plenty of hills with budding green, and the metropolis stretched out like a giant laying on his back.

The metropolis was generally divisible in two areas.

The city center and the conspicuousness it had, and the outskirts with the average city streets that were of the usually seen type.

Gazed at from a distance, the city center reminded of a tiny bead of mercury as dropped on a sheet of glass. That was where the core of the city was, which was why we called it the city center. The bead of mercury appeared homogeneous, as the center was not comprised of a number of buildings, it was crafted horizontally as just one single gigantic structure. Its height appeared to be of five hundred meters, it was so huge that just looking at it gave me the shivers. Maybe it was built from the beginning with that partition in the shape of a dome, maybe there was a countless number of buildings swarming together and that was how things

came to be, it was unclear. At the very least, given that they were able to support the center using a single building, the internal structure had to be extremely complex indeed. The current investigation was not going to reach that area, however.

The metal-like quality that the building materials themselves left a strong impression of uniformity, and that metallic texture, depending on how the light struck it, took on a wonderful coloring ranging between dull silver and vivid lead, one that could not be accurately told. It was truly a mercury-like metropolis.

As was typical of metropolitan ruins, erosion due to elemental exposure and plants was visible in the suburbs. The remains of a large number of rotten wooden buildings could be seen in the spaces between the vegetation. And still, the state of preservation of this metropolis was among the best known. Many normal metropolises were half-eaten by forests, and this area where erosion was late in coming was not like those.

The investigation was to begin from the suburbs.

Assistant-san was staring at the city center area as if physically struck.

"You look interested too, Assistant-san, how about we leave now?"

I questioned and he nodded vigorously.

"There seems to be little if any need for physical excavation, so we've decided to just go for information recovery."

We approached the suburbs' main street and there we joined up with the rest without issues. I heard that every other member had already begun their investigation, so it was only the two of us who had to receive an explanation starting from the beginning.

"I suspect you're curious about that massive building in the center, but for now we're not investigating that far. We're investigating things straightforwardly, starting from the outer edge. Books and written materials are all good, but our real goal is electronic information. Got that? You two'll make for one investigation group, I pick an area you'll be in charge with, and you go. In case you discover anything, we will have a consultation and then shift personnel accordingly."

"What area will we be in charge of?"

"I set you up in an area of low importance. You're an apprentice, in the unlikely case you make a mistake and break an information device, the damage should not be that extensive."

"...confidence zero, I see."

"That's also a result of a consideration of the safety side."

"You know, I just heard a really disturbing word there?"

Safety side? Were there dangers?

"As you can see, there's a large number of machinery that have automatically begun operating after we supplied them with electricity. Depending on the place, there could be danger, I suppose. In particular, when met with unknown mechanisms, paying attention becomes a necessity. However, as far as the area you're in charge of, there's no worry of that."

"How come?"

"Because I chose a safe area with nearly no facilities."

"Mgh..."

Treated like half a person, I must say.

"I see you're dissatisfied. I will at least listen to your requests, then. What are do you want to put under the microscope?"

"The one over there."

Without hesitation I pointed at the city center. Grandfather's face twisted in despair.

"...if you're still misled by the ostentatiousness of what you can see with your naked eye, then you're still too young and naive."

"It is still investigating the ruins, really. I bet I could get credit for many things over there."

"No go, no go. The building may have gotten fragile. We're only dealing with high-rise buildings in limited ways, this is nothing we can leave to you. Also, though I know you already won't, absolutely don't go to the electricity collection facilities here in the outskirts."

"And why is that?"

"They're facilities for power distribution that are receiving high-output microwaves. Depending on the place, even without touching anything you might get a fatal electrical shock. They're dangerous. Also, energy collection facilities are themselves important locations that haven't received inspections and maintenance for many long years. Just messing with measuring tools could cause problems, at worst it's possible that the connection with the satellites gets cut off. They're dangerous in two ways, so I'm forbidding you entry."

"Then where should we go play?"

I asked that with a tinge of desperation and,

"In here."

What he showed me on the map was a tight area that was nearly a slit.

It had an abbreviation, it was stamped with a 'W' symbol.

"What does this symbol mean?"

"Ancient public toilets."

We were walking in a townscape in which the old coexisted with the new.

Buildings with neither stones nor trees systematically lined both sides of the road. As far as classification these would not fit under high rises, and still these ordinary buildings did reach a height of three to five floors.

"...we cannot enter nearly any building, in short."

It looked like this was going to be a simple investigation.

To ensure we were not caught in any collapse, Assistant-san and I were walking in the very center of the road.

The width of the road was such that twenty people could walk side by side in a single row, and more than a road it felt like one continuous plaza laid sideways.

"There were really a great many people who lived here, indeed."

"..."

"Yes? What is it?"

Assistant-san was pointing at the ground. There were people scattered about, turned into skeletons.

"Those are not people. They are ex-people."

"..."

"Yes? Ahhh, that is... a garbage truck, I believe. I saw something similar in an old movie."

The large garbage collection vehicle was toppled over at the edge of the street. As to just what possible situation could have flipped over something this massive, that remained a mystery.

"That said, rather than an archaeological site, the state of preservation would make it more correct to call this an abandoned city, indeed."

Even if overall they were battered from long disuses, there were no fatally destructive collapses in any building. As far as traces that just barely reminded me of a time long past,

that would be the nameplates crushed by corrosion and laying scattered on the road. These in short meant that no insurrection happened even in the final years.

"This is very interesting, but first of all, let us focus on our job, I would say."

We reached our destination.

"....."

We looked back at the map once more, doublechecking the location.

"There is no mistake, is there."

There should have been a small public park in the area we were responsible for.

Except no, it was not there. It had disappeared.

What was there in its stead was something that had the same color as the city center, a small mountain that appeared to be pure hardened mercury. Next to the small mountain, there were thick, bare pipes jutting out from the ground. The pipes were for spreading molten metal, so it appeared that, as a result, this small mountain had solidified.

"What possible use could these devices have had, I wonder."

Landfill: no other word but that came to mind.

We were going to investigate, but the metallic part had solidified, and there was nothing we could do at that point. It was like a drop of mercury had leaped off the city center.

Assistant-san and I headed into opposite directions to investigate.

Assistant-san then beckoned me over with his hand.

"Did you find something?"

"..."

"What? This is..."

In a part of the small mountain there was, buried, the entrance to an elevator.

The door had been left open, and we could see a small space in which about four adult people could ride. We tried entering. When we did the door closed, and we were sealed in.

"Assistant-san... is that?"

Why, if the control panel's switches were not nice and shining.

"You pushed it, did you?"

I asked cheerfully.

"... (nod)"

"If we get involved in some trouble because you recklessly touched an unknown machine—"

The sealed room began moving.

"Too late..."

We were already involved in this, indeed.

There were no windows so I could not see how we were moving, but given I felt my body being pushed downwards, it appeared we were ascending at high speeds.

"Hahaah, it is in fact an elevator, this thing!"

Assistant-san stared intently at his own fingertips.

The power of a technology, which could call down impressive results with a single finger, might have been alluring to him.

"Can I have a turn?"

Thinking of trying to stop the elevator, I pressed random buttons on the panel. However, no matter what button I pushed, there was no seeming stop to its motion.

"It appears it will not stop until it gets to its destination."

As we were moving up down left right in every which direction, the elevator seemed to draw a complex and three-dimensional path. Every time the direction of movement changed we inclined like leaning towers, felt like we were gently floating, or were tightly crushed down.

"Ah, it shifted to horizontal motion... ah, this time it is downwards... ngh... u-, upwards again?" Continually stirred up alongside this sealed space nearly made my carsickness reappear. The crampedness was harsh on its own.

"Ngh, this might be bad."

I held down my mouth and pushed my back into a wall. Assistant-san stroked my back, but this did not like it would settle down. In this situation in which I did not even have a sickness bag, the only behavior that could lead to feeling better was to just bear it. I did my best and fought the increased pressure from within, and when I was at last approaching the final limit, the elevator graciously stopped.

"It was long, it was too long..."

Dlong, with that celebrity sound that emitted an air of luxury (a doorbell's buzzing was conversely the cheap sound of the general public, you see), the door slid open to its sides. There laid a hermetically sealed interior.

"It is pitch black."

There was no illumination nor were there windows. With only the faint light filtering in from the interior of the elevator it did not appear possible we could estimate the space before us. Investigating a darkness that might be above ground, or perhaps underground, we could not tell, appeared to be quite the terrifying deed.

"Feels like it would be better if we went back. Although the dizziness was harsh on me..."

If we pressed any of the buttons, we should be able to return to our place of origin.

I faced back the panel and found several dozen buttons arranged there, all with figures and alphabet text and kanji combined into a hybrid that felt like a coded display.

"This is so complicated! Really, which button is the place we came from?"

"...?"

He only shook his head to the sides with a puzzled face.

"So you pushed a button without understand what it was?!"

He made a face like he could not understand why I was getting angry at him. He was too powerful a challenger...

"If by mistake you had pressed the wrong button, we could have been taken to an even stranger place!"

...that was likely.

What do we do now. Maybe investigate here and search for ways to return by our own strength, or bet everything on trying to operate the elevator... when I had thought that far, I remembered the existence of the transmission device. Transmission devices had been distributed to the staff of the current investigation.

"The transmission device. This is truly the convenience of a civilization. Banzai."

I pinched that thing the size of a stick of gum in my hands, worked the hinge and promptly expanded it to the size of a business card. How to use it was simple. Press the registered quick-call button and, if the other side answers, put it carefully to the ears and speak, nothing more.

".....it will not go through."

Though there was a sound like it was transmitting, it did not quite make for a transmission. In its stead, a weird message started coming through.

The number you have called cannot be connected to at present. We are very sorry, but please wait a while and attempt the call again.

"But it looks like it is actually working, then, why?"

As it happened, when I looked carefully, the antenna indicator that showed reception did not have a single bar to it.

"Reception is bad, unbelievable... and here I thought that it could never happen."

The bandwidth being crowded to the point of lines crossing, truly... ah, could it be interference from the electricity-supplying microwaves?

No, absurd. In the first place, the transmission device itself is only able to work because it lies in an environment in which electricity is supplied.

"Whatever else, at present we cannot contact the outside in this place."

The reason was unknown, but that was how things looked like. As I was likely to lose my cool-headedness and scream out, I supported my forehead with my fingers and thought carefully.

"First of all, light."

Next up was the turn of the pocket flashlights. I was glad we brought them. We promptly cast light into the darkness.

"This is a big place."

It was a large space in the shape of a hall which could fit three teensy small houses side by side.

There was nothing that resembled furniture. As far as what was there, several thick pillars supporting the floor. That said, when we carefully illuminated around the place, we discovered one thing that was laying in our way.

"It is some sort of stone slab."

We approached and examined it carefully.

It was about two meters tall. Shape was precisely like some large monolith. There was a further one meter of space between it and the ceiling. My conjecture was this had not been installed here from the beginning, it was taken in from elsewhere and set up here. The material feel was stone. The manufacture was too rough for it to have been mere decoration, and I could perceive the feeling that it had been constructed quite hastily. It just barely had edges.

"Seems like they just installed a monolith here... maybe it was fashionable?"

That was silly.

From the roots to up above, we made our lights slide across it, and we made the further discovery of letters carved near its center.

"Uhm... what is this...?"

Oyagi

That was what I read. It felt like I had heard it somewhere.

We illuminated further up.

"...!"

We discovered something shocking.

Near the top of the monolith, just a little bit above the letters, a human skeleton had been pinned there with a massive thumbtack. T-, that was—

"...a warning."

From here onwards'ts our territory so your lives're forfeit, that is the sort of thing it meant.

"I do not know what era this warning is from, but I suppose eras in which public safety was a concern did exist."

Behind me there was a 'dlong' sound. In a panic I turned around, and found that, what else,

the doors of the elevator had automatically closed.

"Ah, wait..."

I made it to the exterior panel at a jog, but the elevator had already begun moving.

"So, to call it back here..."

I kept pushing buttons haphazardly, but the light that indicated the reception of input did not illuminate at all. I had the feeling that this external panel was in fact broken.

"...what are we going to do now..."

It looked like all choices except advancing forwards had vanished.

"That said, even if we advance onwards, we have to exit this hall... but where from?"

Though I cast light in the darkness, it did not reach all the way to the opposite wall. It was a deep, dense darkness. Breaths held we stepped on the side beyond the monolith. The elevator was advancing rapidly behind us, and promptly darkness enveloped us.

The lucky thing was that we immediately hit upon a wall. We targeted our light beams to the right, and found an old metal door half-opened.

"Let us have a look inside."

The gap in the door was only slight, so we could not fit in as it was. We combined our strengths and dragged the iron door open. The twisted lower end of the door made a loud scraping sound on the floor, and the scratching echoed loud. Though I knew there was no one, I felt nervous about being possibly noticed by someone of the Monolith Kingdom living inside.

Because of the friction the door exerted on the floor, it remained fixed in an open position.

I leaned into the space on the other side with only my upper body and illuminated it with my pocket flashlight.

In there laid a terrifying, cramped corridor.

It was a bizarre corridor, sized such that people passing past each other would bump into each other's shoulders. The bared building materials on the walls and floor were the same as the larger hall. It was just that the ceiling of the corridor was packed tight with crude metal pipes. And, as expected, the depths were lost in the darkness and could not be witnessed.

"Not quite a place I am eager to investigate, this."

We examined the interior of the hall, but it appeared that there were no other doors. In short, we could do nothing but go in.

"Shall we head inside?"

When I asked that, an odd sound echoed out from his belly.

Grrrwl.

Assistant-san held his belly with both hands and quietly gave me eyes that spoke.

"... (grrrwl)"

"Are you perhaps hungry?"

"... (grrrwl)"

He was doing nothing but growling.

The nausea I had until a short while ago made me not notice that, but I seemed to be also a little hungry.

"Let us have a meal before departing."

We opened each baggage and made a simple meal of three canned crackers and several slices of salt-pickled chicken tenderloin. We wanted warm food or some drink after the meal, but we had neither the time nor the space to cook, and all we could do is carry practical water to our mouths.

Assistant-san uttered no complaints about that insipid meal (although I believed I still did my

best and put together something proper), but only directed the occasional puzzled gaze at me.

"Did we prepare portable food intentionally because we knew this sort of things would happen? Not at all, ridiculous. We just happened to pack it."

"....."

Even more doubting came from him. I acted the senpai (in actuality it was Assistant-san who was the senpai) and made a declaration that would pave over all of this.

"I am a Mediator. And being in daily contact with the fairies means that I could be involved in something troublesome at any moment. When the most improbable thing happened, I had to protect myself by myself, and how do you think that went? I only did the most obvious things. Guarantees were only and ever what I gained by my own strength. Only once you are able to do that you can be called a full-fledged adult and member of society."

"... (clap clap clap)"

There came generous clapping and a gaze of admiration. It felt good to talk all self-importantly, indeed. The real reason was to simply put out a few words for self-protection, so it felt a little embarrassing.

After all, this time it did not seem likely that the fairies would come save us. I did not want to die or get injured, and since I did not want to die, I wanted to live a long life (true intentions numbering several).

To also add to that, I did not want to make detours, either, however I of course had to give that up this time.

"Now then, let us depart. We need to find what our present location is, then join up with the main group."

We were advancing down a jet black corridor.

I was borrowing the fairly strong light of a hand flashlight. It was a reassuring light source that could illuminate without problems up to around ten meters ahead. That said, however, and regardless of that, the darkness pressing on us from every side was overwhelming, and I felt disheartened. The corridor was much longer and complex than I had imagined.

On the way the path curved several times, and we found not a single room. The descriptions that felt right for this structure were the likes of *total nonsense* or *enough of this already*. As a place this felt like a cave made out of building materials.

We wandered down this artificial cave for a fairly long time. On the way we tried transmitting, but reception remained impossible. In the silence enveloping us, the sound of our stepping on gravel reverberated especially loudly.

"This is incomprehensible. I just have to wonder why this structure has come to be like this, truly."

The corridor was cramped. In a metropolis crowded with people, why was a path so complicated it constituted a loss of a large amount of space considered necessary?

Because it had been rebuilt to extreme extents?

Did the city planning collapse as it was being rebuilt, and ended up like this as a result?

"There is a staircase. Watch your step, Assistant-san."

We descended the staircase and found that the main path again continued, neither smoothly nor straightforwardly.

"You cannot be telling me that this grew of its own strength, like a plant."

"....."

I kept on walking as I was letting out complaints about the sloppy work.

"Ah, there is light."

Just after turning a corner, right ahead of us, we discovered a strong light pouring down from the ceiling. We tried moving to right under it and found that it was not illumination, it was sunlight.

"So warm..."

There was the scent of an afternoon of early Summer. Despite having stood in the darkness for a mere few dozen minutes, I felt a terrible longing for the outside world.

There was a large hole in the ceiling, one that had been opened by some fallen object. That was the passage for the light. Before this it would have been a normal ceiling, of course. The diameter drilled out as a result of the destruction was of around one meter, and I could ascertain that the insulating material and metal boards, layered like in an overstuffed sandwich, had a cross-section about five centimeters thick. It did resemble a geological stratum.

"It looks like they were using special materials, I see. I wonder, were they for strengthening?"

We could see the impact point of something that had pierced into the ground as it fell, and saw cracks running radially from it. The impact looked like an iron hammer had struck the ground. We could not find the thing itself which had fallen. It was thinkable that it had already been taken away by somebody. It was also possible that it happened many centuries in the past, of course. We could not even guess the identity of what had fallen.

I estimated the distance to the hole in the ceiling and let out a groan.

"It would be nice if we could escape from here, but this is a non-starter. We cannot reach that far."

But even if our hands could not reach, maybe reception could. The antenna display that shows reception state, there in a corner of the small display, showed just one bar. Maybe it will go through, maybe who knows. I put the transmission device to my ear with little expectation.

"Oh, it's you. Why—"

It connected, or so I thought for an instant, but an intense interference intercepted reception. I suspected that Grandfather was talking about something, but I could not make it out. I tried calling back several times, but the result was the same.

"This did appear to be somewhat better than other places, however... with things like this it does not appear that we can have a proper conversation."

We were quite reluctant to leave the area right below the light, but we decided to continue into the depths of the corridor. Thinking that the ground was always right above us made me feel somewhat better. We turned several corners, we ascended staircases, we descended staircases, and finally, for the first time, we came to a path shaped like the letter T where we stopped walking.

"More and more like a maze, it seems. Assistant-san, could you give me the silver can case that is inside that bag?"

The interior of the pencil case-sized can that I received was jam-packed with sticklike jelly-like items. Called glow sticks, if bent forcefully the interior reacted and emitted light for a long time. I bent one into a less-than sign, and after ensuring that it had begun emitting light, I put it on the ground.

As it used the half-life of radioactive materials, I would not say it was semi-permanent, but it should emit light for about a decade. With electricity, convenient items like these could be produced without end at universal plants, definitely a good thing.

"..."

"What? It is shining and that is too beautiful? That is a landmark, you see. That way, even if we come back here we will not be lost."

After that, we picked the path to the right. We walked for a while, and on the way we discovered large double doors. They did not seem to be operated by electricity. With Assistant-san, the two of us managed to push it open.

"This place looks like a warehouse, I would say."

It was a room of quite the size. Given how the pocket flashlights' beams could just barely graze the walls, it looked like it had a depth of around ten meters, give or take. There was no furniture nor were there windows inside the room, there were iron walls as tall as I was forming rows. They were already rusted and their own weight made them begin to twist at their bottom, and they were, in other words, cabinets.

"How about we have a look, just in case?"

"..."

We each set about on whatever cabinets and, following the manners of robbers, we opened the trays beginning from the bottom. That way there was no longer any need to close the trays, a process which saved us time. We just skipped the trays that were too twisted and did not open. After all, this was not a detailed investigation.

The first one was empty. The second one had only screws sitting right there in the middle of nothing. The third had tattered clothes, but the fourth only had simple construction equipment tossed inside.

"This just does not seem like a place that has been used properly."

And that despite how, normally, in places like these there should be important documents that would give us a hint.

"How is it going over there?"

The boy indicated with just gestures that there was nothing.

We casually tried going for different trays, but of course there was no valuable and outstanding treasure. Assistant-san approached me at a jog.

"...? (I found something like a tiny medal, see?)"

"We do not need it."

I tossed it away.

"..... (sad)"

"B-, but see, it had 'children's bank' written on it, so... a toy, it was only a toy!"

It would be an issue if this created a trauma in his susceptible young boy period.

The room search finished, in the end we had no harvest.

"That was bound to happen, I suppose. Let us hurry on forwards."

We went up and down staircases, at times used stepladders, and as we advanced in this endless corridor, and eventually we could no longer tell which direction we were proceeding towards.

The one thing we felt was that the chaoticness of this mosaic city far surpassed what we had hypothesized. The bizarreness of not just the exterior, but the interior construction as well were not normal. As we continued our search, that feeling became stronger and stronger. We managed to spot several rooms and warehouses in the twisty corridor, but we could find nothing more than scrap scattered in a ruin.

Within the corridor's pathless intricacy, the rooms were distributed eerily and haphazardly. It did not appear to be the result of a proper city plan. In the era in which this city was alive, what sort of intent did the residents have in creating buildings so labyrinthine?

We nearly never spotted facilities that would serve for living a life, which made this all bizarre.

Maybe they were simply under construction, maybe they were never used to begin with, maybe there was another reason.

Still with questions to us, we continued walking.

After six hours we stopped walking. We had found the first lit light.

"At last... a facility that works..."

The place seemed to be an indoor park that made use of the large hall.

It seemed to have its own fair bit of size. At least at a glance, it seemed several times the size of the first hall. Once we got outside we would have as much nature as we wanted, of course, so the reason why a park in the stifling indoors did not seem unthinkable was because, at that point, we were thinking of a situation in which we could not avoid being indoors anymore.

Although it felt out of place, the sensation of artificial grass laid on the ground on the feet in practice healed our emotions. The area right below the sole shining streetlight was filled with benches. As we had walked the hard and cold corridors for a long time, we were exhausted. Side by side with Assistant-san I sat down on a bench, and strength lifted from my whole body.

"If I walk any more my feet are going to hurt, so we will make our departure tomorrow."

"....."

Even the face of Assistant-san, which I could see properly for the first time in a long while, was a little bit pale from the hard work.

Transmission was unchangedly impossible. Not contacting him for a night would make Grandfather worry, that was certain, however... there were precedents, so he will deal with this with a cool head.

"But we cannot hope for a rescue team to come for us... we need to get out of this with our own strength."

However vast, this was in the end the interior of a building. If we took all day tomorrow we should quickly find an escape route or something, an optimistic view that I still held at that time. Indeed, for at present I was still able to act with a cool head.

"When you feel down, it is time to eat."

We undid our baggages and decided that this time we would make a somewhat luxurious dinner. In this situation, just cooking would put us easily in the realm of luxury.

"We should eat the things that will spoil first, of course."

We boiled water with the portable stove, and after transferring enough to drink in a cup, we tossed in our portable food bars.

The lard and butter that solidified the bars melted, and we had a highly nutritious meat and vegetable soup. It was greasy. But we were tired, so it was delicious. Together we marvelously flattened slightly broiled crackers and sausages, that we did. One bar was one thousand five hundred calories. Greasy. Irresistible.

If we were to eat these things daily, terrible things would happen to our physique, indeed. As someone who loved sweets I needed to be careful about those things.

After the meal we began sipping coffee drowned in marshmallows, and as our relaxation came to its extreme we were struck by sleepiness on the dot.

We took up place on the grass and laid down.

We spun up the rotors on the pocket flashlights, recharging their expended batteries at least a little bit.

"One rotation is thirty minutes of illumination... four rotations are one hundred and twenty minutes of illumination..."

Thinking that there was a possibility that we would also be wandering about the whole of the next day, we gave it a full twenty spins. However, unexpectedly, this act of rotation also had a sheep counting effect.

"Zzz..."

I slept easy.

At seven AM I woke up not to the sun but to a cold light.

"Mh?"

My head, still not clear from having just woken up, could not understand why I was sleeping below a streetlight. I lifted my upper body and looked around, and at last I remembered that we had come to investigate these ruins.

"...a nasty morning, I would say."

Even this light, for which I had been so grateful the previous night, right now only amplified the sensation that we were trapped.

Assistant-san, who had slept curled up in his sleeping bag nearby, was beginning to wake up.

"Good morning."

"..."

Nod, and Assistant-san moved only his head, still a little dazed.

"Today we are really going to escape from here."

"..."

Feebly raising his fist to indicate his approval, Assistant-san still had line-like eyes that felt like he could fall asleep again at any moment.

"You really look sleepy. Did you actually fall asleep late?"

"...mh."

"Eh?"

He handed me a pocket flashlight in silence. This was what I had in hand at the point in time that was the day before. Battery was at full capacity. I had fallen asleep right away, and he had spun them in my place.

"Why, thank you, thank you."

I put my palms together in the Oriental way for Assistant-san, who was so marvelously capable of consideration for other people.

Assistant-san looked awkward.

"Also as thanks, I will make oatmeal for breakfast."

Assistant-san made a face like he did not like that.

A natural response. There was no child who liked oatmeal. It was the obvious thing to think corn flakes as more tasty. I was the same.

But we could not quite carry milk around, and so.

"Once you get used to it, this is quite the nice thing, you know?"

They served it nearly every day at The School, and at some point the time came we got used to it, or rather, we had given up about it. Mix oatmeal with hot water, drop in some raisins to give it at least some flavor, and complete.

"For the occasion we should clean up with the oiled sardines, I suppose. It is a possibility that we will have a long way to go, you see."

When we brought this massive amount of food we were conscious that some would remain left over.

I ripped a can open, took the sardines shining bluish from having been well submerged in oil, and put them on the cracker with the accompanying sliced onions. That was all.

"Here, an open sardine sandwich."

Assistant-san carried it very fearfully to his mouth, but once he had his first bite he opened his eyes in surprise, and the rest was a display of his now lively appetite and putting it away.

"Tea is indispensable for mornings. This could well be said to be a duty determined by law."

We had brought abundant teabags, so we did not need to be sparing.

"I would like some milk or lemon, but, well, we cannot quite ask for luxuries of that sort."

We finished our moderately elegant breakfast, then sorted through our bags and started to prepare for our departure at last.

And, once again, it was going to be an investigation team of just the two of us, in the darkness, advancing at a walk.

Its deeply inexplicable structure yet unchanged, the corridor chaotically twisted up down left and right, fully stealing away the orientation of us searchers.

We walked onwards, we ascended and we descended.

To preserve our stamina, we spontaneously became wordless during the march, but as the monotonous rhythm kept by the sound of our shoes was the only noise, our consciousness was distracted.

Though one normally was not conscious about the sound of one's shoes, the more we walked, the more it felt like the volume was amplified, which was likely an auditory hallucination. Irritation sneakily eroded awareness, and an anxiety of unknown source tinged with itchiness hovered in the background, fattening those perceptions. In there the cold darkness and the squirming flow of time intermixed, making differentiating between time and sound and darkness unreliable.

It was so long...

Suddenly I felt my throat dry, and I mechanically carried my canteen to my mouth. Plop, went an unreliable sound. Though I did not want to, I became conscious of the volume of water remaining.

Thinking about water, I felt uneasy about a gradual tightening in my heart.

Up till now we had not come across places to draw water from even once. We did not know if we could replenish our supply or not from here on out. Though we did not have worries about our food yet, it looked like we would need to decrease what we drank starting now.

I announced that to Assistant-san and he nodded with a face that said it was nothing to fret about.

He was a heavyweight. The type that could serenely accept fate.

Thinking of the possibility of being tossed in here without preparations gave me a jolt up the spine. It was truly a good thing that we prepared for self-defense.

"The mistake was not bringing graph paper with."

"...?"

"Graph paper was, you see, used in the distant past to make charts of underground caves, or so I happened to see on a notebook. Why I do not understand, but it appeared that for making maps of complex cave systems, graph paper was indispensable. If only we had graph paper, we could restore something to its original purpose."

"..."

Assistant-san went '*mh-hm, mh-hm*', persuaded.

"According to another theory, further in the future from that, people were building maps with styluses or something. What it was all about did not reach us, however."

Showing off that miscellaneous knowledge I had only barely heard about scratched away at that confusing sense of vertigo, and I could feel my presence of mind returning.

Talking was better for the stability of the heart than keeping silent, indeed.

As we kept walking, we hit eight at night. We interrupted our investigation and decided to make camp right there in the corridor. With no illumination we came to have a dark bivouac, but as we were surprisingly eroded by fatigue and hunger, soon as we sat down we could no longer move. Moving on flat ground would have been one thing, but we had been going up and down stepladders and staircases for over ten hours, it was natural that we would exhaust our strengths completely, I would say.

"This became a big adventure..."

We could only persistently endure a reality that had no remorse.

At the present hour, we were still in a state of not having secured an escape route. Whether we were approaching an exit, or getting more distant from one, even that we could not judge. Like this we could imagine many bad things, even that right beyond this wall we were next to would return us to a location right next to our point of departure.

"Even the compass is going crazy, incredible..."

This was trouble.

The two of us laid our food on top of a picnic sheet, ate heartily, took turns to spin the charging devices, cleaned ourselves with soap that did not require water, and after that slipped in our sleeping bags. The transmission device, as always, remained unusable.

The next day, we had a light meal, outfitted ourselves, and departed.

Our impatience, the one which said that we would escape quickly once we arrived here, had vanished, and we became steadily more aware that it would take some time before our escape.

Motivation of course did not call fortune to it, however, thirty minutes of walking in a corridor with no visible alteration, we came to have the vague omen that something was about to change.

At some point, the right-hand side of the corridor changed from wall to railing.

Railings were set up to ensure people would not fall to the other side. As a test I tried to extend my hand and found that the wall that should have been there was not, and my fingertips were stirring up dry air as they wandered about.

"We are walking across a catwalk."

"...?"

"What? You want to know if we are high up? Yes, I would say we are in quite the high location, indeed. To compare, if the city center is a single giant tower then this is a spiral staircase with walls installed in that interior. This space is maybe an atrium or a stairwell. The walls and the space are both in the same darkness, so we did not notice that, you see."

The problem was, these footholds, with what goal had they been installed?

"The area we have been wandering about was, therefore, under construction, no mistake.

This passage is for administrative use."

"..."

I continued without waiting for his reply.

"This disordered state, unsuitable for dwelling, can be explained by that. Therefore, if we continue advancing ahead as we are, we will certainly and definitely come to the area where people live."

Assistant-san took out one of the glow sticks.

I quickly figured out his intent.

"Go on, do it."

He snapped the light in half and tossed it beyond the railing. The bent stick emitting blue light fell forever and ever. Light got further away, eventually turned into something the size of a single dot, and still we did not hear the sound of it falling to the ground.

"...deep indeed."

Assistant-san also nodded and agreed.

"Still, we have obtained one bit of information. We are a fair bit of height into the building, that is where we are."

"... (clap clap clap.)"

"Let us just continue on."

A cheer of strength came to our wilting willpower, and our step sped up.

We headed forwards into the passage, our hands still on the railing. Forty or fifty minutes later, at the end of a fairly lengthy walk, a staircase leading upwards was waiting for us.

"We can do nothing but go."

There was no other choice. We climbed the staircase, following the path in the opposite direction when it switched back. Assistant-san broke a piece of bar chocolate, making it in two chunks. One he tossed into his mouth, the other he gave to me.

"We are feeling the adventuring mood at long last, indeed."

I put this chocolate with no decorations or anything special to it on my tongue. A sweetness so intense it nearly numbed me spread in my mouth. We were skipping lunch, and this was how we were going to gain energy during the march.

Something changed again after about thirty minutes had passed.

This time, on the opposite side wall of the atrium or arcade or whatever it was, we discovered an iron door of rough construction.

"This is quite the sturdy door, indeed."

I squeezed hard the handle that kept the door firmly closed.

"This does not look feasible alone. May I ask you please?"

The two of us grabbed the handle that resembled a ship's steering wheel and rotated it, pulling it towards us. The door, thick like a lump of bacon, slipped out from the front of the wall.

"—!"

A flash of light.

An explosion of light burned our retinas.

That was nearly physically painful, so I thrust myself into the darkness.

I was withdrawing so far backwards that for a brief while I was fully pushed into the railing, and noticing that, a shiver ran down my back.

If the railing had come off, or I had leaned over and beyond it—

"Assistant-san, please be careful. If you move about too much you will fall!"

I could tell the boy's presence stirring right next to me.

Because we had been submerged in the darkness for a long time, our eyes had of course become unable to deal with light. Our retinas, which had become sensitive to even the faintest lights in that world of darkness, did not tolerate the suddenly encroaching light.

Correct, on the other side of the door... was the external world.

Regretting even the time it would take for our eyes to adjust to the light of the sun, we leaned out on the other side.

The clear blue sky we felt so dazzling it hurt our eyes.

I was completely lost, dedicating my whole self to gazing at the sky for the first time in days when Assistant-san tugged at my sleeve.

"...yes?"

Accepting my gaze with calm and collected eyes, he pointed at the ground.

As guided I shifted my gaze and—

"Wah!"

The location we were at was the city center.

It was dangerous and so we were warned not to approach it, that ultra-high density aggregate high rise building I had once named a baumkuchen... we were on the exterior wall right next to its exact top.

"W-, we are so high up..."

An estimated height was about five hundred meters.

We were on the landing of a staircase installed into the exterior wall as if stitched on it.

"Worse, it is broken!"

This staircase zig-zagged back and forth and should have existed in order to connect above with below, but given the height it was built far too flimsily, and so it got torn off partway through and dangled down.

"Why make a staircase this thin when it would be exposed to the elements this much...!"

I pulled Assistant-san's hand and drew back to the landing enshrouded in darkness.

The sturdiness of the catwalk's built was incomparable to the external staircase. Putting my weight on the former made me regain calmness at last.

"And just when we had finally gotten outside."

"..." Assistant-san was pointing at one direction in silence.

In that direction, however, spread the city's suburbs.

Straining my eyes, I had a feeling like I was seeing many a tiny grain-like things moving about. Right, right, I had a small-sized telescope with me.

"Dear me, they are the people performing the investigation."

Enlarged, I could conclude that the grains were each a human being. They were all surveying their designated search area.

Having friends where my sights could reach was heartening, and a good thing. The problems were how we were at a distance which would never be covered even by shouting, and whether they would be able to come here and rescue us even if we could make contact.

It was a situation in which we could do nothing except smile.

"First of all, let us attempt making contact."

Reception was good. The sound of calling had no interference. Not long after that we began communication proper, and I could hear the voice of Grandfather.

"Where are you?"

He immediately started with an inquisitive tone of voice.

Perhaps it was the worry at a flesh-and-blood-relative level, perhaps it was him baring his feelings of relief, perhaps it was kindness, perhaps it was a need.

"Explaining would take long."

"In short."

"We got lost and are right in the middle of the city center."

I believed it a concise explanation, but Grandfather groaned like a beast and fell silent.

"Escaping by our strength looks difficult. I would like you to arrange immediately for a rescue helicopter, please."

"...it looks like you have a special talent for getting into trouble even without the fairies around."

"Please stop it with the sarcasm. We are in a real pickle."

"Then stop joking around with helicopters and that stuff. We don't have any of that, of course. Hurry up and come back. That area hasn't even received preliminary investigation. You're gonna mess up the ruins!"

Words so mercilessly violent that they nearly made me swear that, if I ever had children, I would without fail be nice to them.

"...it is a maze, this place. We have been wandering about all along. To put it in two brief words, help me!"

I heard a spectacular sigh. Loud and clear.

"...far as I go, I've no clue about anything in that place."

"It is a place built tremendously strangely."

"Anything conspicuous?"

"Nothing, this place appears to have been abandoned during development, there is absolutely nothing whatsoever."

"What route did you come in there from?"

"We were dramatically carried in by an elevator."

"That wasn't an elevator. We've concluded it was the main means of intra-metropolitan transportation. Sad to say that there's a mountain of them operational, so singling a specific one out's hard."

Was there nothing that made for a clue?

"...in the entrance there was this huuuge monolith just standing there. A skeleton was hung on it."

"What's that all about?"

I summarized the proceedings and spoke them to him.

"A very interesting report, but... it looks like if we sent a rescue team in that situation we'll just end up with a double stranding. Why didn't you contact me before now?"

"It appears that the transmission device cannot be used inside the building."

"...we got a lot of different theories as far as the reason why the city center had turned into a single massive sealed structure, but whatever else, it seems that those that say it's for EM wave prevention are more applicable."

"Grandfather, debriefing comes later, a hint on how to escape, please."

"...I wanted you people to come out today, but fine, I won't say anything. I can't do anything, you people are going to have to escape of your own efforts. Whatever else, that's a facility in which people lived. It shouldn't be that hard."

There was an electric sound, 'beep'.

"Grandfather, the battery seems to be about to give."

"Act, that's what I'm saying. If you end the call right away and move, you should be able to call me one more time."

"Ah, uhm, we do not have much water at hand, which is creating problems."

"You shouldn't be sealed in airtightly. If you head downwards you should be able to find some rainwater puddles. The rest is, you know. How to say it... even dirty water, if boiled, shouldn't be undrinkable."

"That will be our very last resort, so..."

"Then act swiftly. You're wasting battery. I'm gonna hang up here. I pray for your success."

Conversation over.

And of course we had to escape on our own efforts... we had finally come to contact the outer world like this, only to then be forced to return to that darkness.

It was the cruelty of the real world and all that.

"And so, we will be going back to that maze once again."

Assistant-san had seemingly predicted that, as his face did not seem very shocked about this.

"We will retrace our path from here for several hours, moving so as to head downwards.

Economizing water will make this quite harsh, I believe, but we should do our best."

Assistant-san nodded vigorously.

It was a hard road indeed.

The act of taking time and retracing our steps in this situation gradually increased our unease. Around two hours had lapsed by the time we had gotten back to the last staircase. This was where I wanted to go with some tea, but we could do nothing but avoid stopping our feet and hurry on ahead.

I was thirsty. I licked a candy and dodged the bulle-tea (used to be more literal).

The narrow and dark corridor reminded me of an ants' nest.

This place not only lacked the elegance of classical styles, functionality was also nonexistent.

It was something made in madness that had the tinge of the excavation of an escape cellar. If so, then it had to be hiding people to some extent.

The beautiful vista of ancient cities that gave one more than a moment of pause were in the wooden houses that were now becoming a fusion of residential areas with forest, of course, but also out in the vast open urban areas. So how come that, just in this city center, which ought to have been the result of a slow accumulation of technology and calculations, lacked the vestiges, the very scent of civilization?

Patchwork. Coupled with my memories of a sweeping view of the city, that word came mind.

As we advanced for four hours, for six hours, the heat and the thirst of our bodies began making our consciousness vague. If only this had been a real cavern, then we could have at least expected water springs.

The breathing of Assistant-san, walking behind me, was also ragged.

The fatigue accumulated in three days was at long last beginning to assail us.

There was no change in the corridors. No water sources, either.

Whenever we found staircases we went down, whenever we found stepladders we went down, our choices were mechanical.

Whenever we hit a dead end we withdrew with chagrin, but we were still capable of giving our full strength.

Even as our spirits became dulled and discouragement came, we mechanically recomposed our motions, that was how we were. We wordlessly drew back, wordlessly returned to the previous divergence point, wordlessly put our feet on the ladders, it was all a single fluid motion, we no longer had the force to slump our shoulders and feel that as a loss of any significance.

From an outsider's viewpoint, we were zombies controlled by some voodoo spell, no mistake. That was also because, once in a while, I groaned out loud "nggh! nggh!" to distract from the harshness of the thirst.

Sigh, a maze like this should come with monsters, should it...

I recalled how, when I was at The School, I was often recruited by my friends for this queer tabletop game played with paper, dice, and conversation. We played the roles of soldiers or shamans from ages past, slaying monsters hidden in the depths of mazes, gaining treasure and experience points... it was not a game I quite understood to point of, mind.

Personally, I liked the books that you could play with by yourself. There were plenty in the library at The School, yes indeed, there were. There were several volumes I had not beaten, if

I recall correctly. I thought that I would finish all of them before graduation, I truly regret not doing that, yeah.

If there was anything that would make me show face at The School again it would have been—

A faint change could be seen in the scene lit by the light of the pocket flashlights, which made my feet and thoughts come to a halt.

"...koff!"

I tried talking to Assistant-san but failed. My throat was too dry and I could not speak out. I put the canteen to my mouth and wet my throat just by one sip. I frantically restrained the urge to drink it dry in one go and closed its lid.

"The path has gotten a little wider, I see. Let us have a rest about here."

It was just nine PM.

As I announced that, Assistant-san sat down as if collapsing on the spot.

We made an easy to drink soup with vegetables, jerky, and consommé, dunk in it crackers that did not seem likely to go down the throat as they were, and as we ate, the thirst calmed down at last.

The remaining amount of water was what remained in the two leather bags that we had brought with, a combined 1.5 liters. The amount remaining in our canteens was about half. Economizing all that can be economized, it may last for the next day, or maybe not.

"Tomorrow is when we win or lose, then."

We had food in cans and more that contained water, so we should be barely be able to act on the day after that. That said, on the day after that, or the day after that one, we will not be able to physically move at all. Neither Assistant-san nor I knew where we would draw our limit lines in this extreme situation. If we went a full two days without discovering a source of water, we would discover that.

"...I really want to have some cold tea."

Assistant-san made an extremely serious face as he gave me a long nod.

"If we get back to camp, I will brew you some."

The fourth day.

We did nothing but persistently head downwards.

Not having any need to hesitate regarding our direction was the only thing I was grateful for.

My intellect was simply not working right, you see.

To gain energy to act, we sipped on condensed milk from its container. We could put it on the crackers and eat them that way, but what an absurd way of using them that was, indeed. We were grateful for the liquids even if they amounted to mere consolation. Not just the lips, but the inside of our mouths became dry as desert, and we could no longer easily eat solid things. I believe we encountered a staircase or stepladder around once every thirty minutes.

Our mountain descent speed was at most a mere five meters at a time.

In just one day, I believe we walked for about fourteen hours.

It has been about a day and a half since we began our downwards course. Well, let us put that to twenty-one hours. At the point in time of tonight, the height of five hundred meters came to have a minus of two hundred meters. Which all means that at the present moment in time we are at the very least an accursed three hundred meters of height above the ground.

The sense of despair made the mind go away.

"Nggggh..."

At present, without the protection of the fairies, I could be said to be in the biggest pickle of

my history.

Awww, if only we had water!

Some food with plenty of moisture would be fine too, certainly. A plum, a strawberry, a peach, a fig... awww, I wanted to have a fig. I wanted to enjoy its smell to the fullest and then make a single morsel of it.

As compromise, pudding and jelly would be fine, indeed. But it would be the best if we had sherbet. What other foods full of water were there, now...

I understood that the majority of a human being was water, for example.

In particular, the head... in other words the brain, it is sort of like pudding, is it not. The name of this gruesome menu item, let me see, Gray Pudding à la Knowledge would do. Given that brain matter is gray, you see.

...this was bad, being tantalized by an appetite for human brains means my sense of values had dropped to being exactly like that of a zombie. This was our final hour, was it not. It was about time we thought about distilling dirty water, indeed it was.

Awww jeez, fatigue and thirst made that abundantly clear, or was water that was clear and abundant.

The last soup, using the last of our solid fuel, was today's dinner. We could no longer eat crackers. The little water we were allotted tasted like life so much it made us cry.

And then we slept like dried mud.

The next day, my eyes opened naturally from an intense thirst.

"So heavy..."

The collapse of my physical health showed in my mood when rising, and I could clearly tell how exhausted I was. My whole body felt sluggish and my lips were dry. Naturally my throat was dry, and my appetite had also decreased somewhat.

"The initial symptoms, indeed..."

As dehydration worsened, imbibing water was not quite enough to recover, I heard.

With just a headache or vertigo I could still move, I would say, but if I showed any further symptoms it was going to be dangerous, making this a situation where I absolutely had to find a way to deal with the dehydration, and fast, very fast.

This way to deal with dehydration would be to replenish the lost fluids and fully, meaning all else aside that we absolutely needed to find a source of water as soon as possible.

Assistant-san was already up, dazedly swaying his upper body in the darkness.

"Bwah, you look terrible..."

Still covered in his sleeping bag, he was not even trying to get up. I really understood how he felt at present. So heavy. So overwhelmingly heavy.

"It looks like we preserved our water too much yesterday, indeed."

Using minimal quantities when cooking at both morning and sunset, we put our canteens to our mouths many times on the way. We might be successfully economizing, but if we fell below minimum intake, the result will be that our health would deteriorate, nothing else. We also felt that the tiredness of these consecutive days was baring its fangs.

"Whatever else, if we surmount today we will come to an endurance race that will challenge our limits..."

The remaining water in the leather bags was little, but the canteens were nearly full.

I hesitated a little, then poured what remained in the leather bags in a pot and two cups. And still it was quite insufficient to slake our thirst.

This pouring was a lavish banquet, given the frugality we have had so far, which had

Assistant-san's eyes blink in surprise.

"Let us have a good, solid intake of fluids and do our best for today, as well. I just wish to delay the degradation of our stamina, that is all."

I split a salt pill in half and mixed it in the cup. It will be a little salty, but we will endure, we will endure indeed.

We took our time to have our breakfast, then made ready for departure.

"Come on."

Assistant-san nodded firmly with a face of restored livelihood.

We needed to hurry.

There was not that long a time left. Up until now, whenever there was something attracted our interest on the way we investigated a little, but we no longer had the time for that. We passed by, fully ignoring everything.

The important thing was that we did not miss anything related to water.

The problem, however, was whether we could find any source of drinkable water inside this city...

We did have a simple water purifier, just in case. But what was that going to do, really. It was a product of the present era, who knows what level of purification it was capable of. Removing the toxicity from water unsuitable for drinking was quite the important thing, indeed.

I called it toxicity, but that was something that went from large like pebbles to tiny things such as harmful germs and chemicals.

Will combining that with distillation be enough?

Supposing that right now I discovered sewage (likely of vintage quality) filling a toilet seat, what would I do?

"....."

Even I did not know, not about that.

Ngggh, my hair was starting to smell... that was nothing I should be saying, but I felt like I did not want to walk in front of Assistant-san.

"...Assistant-san, let us drink water."

Canteens. What value these items held now, when on departure they were simple precautions. Our survival today led to tomorrow, our last stand.

"Just one sip, all right?"

Those were not words I needed to go out of my way to see confirmed in the act, given Assistant-san was the firm type.

The two of us came to a halt and approached our canteens to our mouths.

To put it in pounds, it was a quart. The canteen held about one liter. Grandfather said they were used by soldiers or something far, far in the past. I was not certain as to the extent to which that was true, but they definitely had the sturdiness and the volume required to entrust them with the gasoline of life.

When I chose canteens, the choice was this or a more cutesy little one that did not fit more than five hundred milliliters. I felt in the mood to praise myself for doing the right thing and choosing this one. I was like a god. I was God.

I was careful enough. I vigilantly restrained myself. So that I will not be dominated by instinct, for in that instant I was going to drink dry the water of life. My state of mind was precisely that of someone messing about with a precision instrument, and so it was that within this lukewarm darkness I pushed a single large drop of clear transparent water in my throat.

Ahhh...

What to say...

This is so...

I could not say it clearly, but...

It felt like I had really done it...

It felt like I had finally done it...

It felt like that...

Rather, I had the physical sense of how the bead of water was passing through the esophagus, splitting as it fell into the gastric walls, becoming a spray and spreading, so to say...

It was a feeling I could not quite put in a few words...

It was super delish... (I put it in a few words.)

If the currency system still remained, I believed I would rush to use this lesson to build a business that would sell water in the desert at high prices...

That was how much water I had...

In other words, I was the fruit of water...

And so in the vision that I saw in great detail on my eyelids I was the proud queen of a great civilization that had received the blessing of water from a great river, and I rode a palanquin which was held on the backs of youths who called out '*enya totto, enya totto*', and with them I den dededen dede ah there dendede—

"...guh!"

What drew me back from the delusion was my detecting a negative thought wave right in my proximity.

I may not have been able to read situations particularly well, but there was just one thing that I could perceive with sensitivity.

It was the aura of surrender. Or also of depravity. I could feel the very instant in which people who had been too battered by events fell into self-abandonment and let go of what they had been protecting until then with a '*well, I'm done*'. That feeling that I occasionally emitted myself was, of all things, being emitted right next to me.

But except for me, there was only one person.

"Assistant-san...?"

When I lit him with my light, the boy stopped with the canteen still at his lips.

I believed he, too, had drunk.

He received the blessing of Water-sama to his whole body, and should have felt the weight and thankfulness for his life, as well as the mysteries of that already finished desert business venture.

Relieving himself in doing so, he should still be able to bear this.

Despite that—

"You cannot do that!"

I could not rush at him. If I did, the contents of the canteen would spill out. I laid my hand on him and tried to slowly peel it from him. But it was useless.

"...!"

Assistant-san was not about to let go of the canteen.

He tilted it up once, he lowered it once. And that was the end. The hydration rule: that was the rule that he had violated.

"If you drink it all..!"

I put one hand on the boy's canteen, one hand on his forehead, and tried to push the two apart... so hot! ...his forehead was so hot that he might even have a fever. The head of the

boy was a lump of heat, and it remained firm on the rim of the canteen, never letting it go.
His mouth made noises.

Once, twice—
"S-, stop this!"
Twice, thrice—
"Stop!"

I shouted so loud that it felt like my voice was bursting out from the bottom of my belly, but his motions did not stop. I nimbly snatched away the canteen.
How were the contents?

"Awww..."

Half. In that time that did not fill several seconds he had gulped down half.

"What have you done...!"

"....."

He stood stock still with a face that said he himself could not believe what he had done.
Without caring I rudely shone the light at him... and it looked like he had regained his reason.
"And that despite how you are always Mister Well-Behaved... what you just did was just not good, you know."

With his hand at his lips and his gaze averted, the only thing that shivered of this boy with his face inclined downwards were his eyebrows.

That did put me in the mind of forgiving him.

"It means your life, you know, this thing?"

The canteen, filled to the brim until a moment ago, now made an untrustworthy splashing sound.

"You could have drunk anyway, but... if you could not hold it back like you did, you could have told me....."

My words disappeared.

The harshness of thirst was the same as mine, after all. If I had been here alone, I might have done the exact same thing. Taking heed of my weakness, that was a plausible thing.

Had he said that he was at his limits, I would still have had no ingenious idea about what to do to slake his thirst.

"...I understand how you feel. Still, it is just a little more. We will keep desperate moves for just a little later."

Hesitating, and faltering, I returned his canteen.

"...?"

Assistant-san looked tremendously surprised.

It seems he thought I would be confiscating it for a while. Normally I would have, perhaps.

"This is your water, I cannot keep it to myself."

There are reasons, my dear Assistant-san.

If I had held on to it, it was not certain that some momentary urge would not make me put my hand to it. At the moment I was barely managing to act the senpai (to be accurate he was the senpai), that was all. Having surpassed the limit line, I could have no expectations whatsoever even from my very best behavior.

"Now then, let us go. If we find some clean water, we can say farewell to these troubling times."

Right, it was no serious matter. It was a problem we could surmount. I can definitely help.

As I heard nothing back, I once again set my feet forwards.

I decided that we will find help.

Tomorrow these miserable peasants who need to be vigilant not to lose a drop of water will find a luxuriously built VIP room where we will lie on a water bed, we will be drinking straight from massive bottles filled with water while we smoke water pipes, we will spend days and nights watering arguments so dry they could not bear even a single grain of wheat, we will waterboard each other, throw blankets wet with water at each other, and while messing around and have stolen water from fishes, in the end we will bathe in cold water while washing away each other's verbal improprieties, that was the plan most divine.
...well, even if it was not possible, at least half of those things I did want to have.
As a reward for a spectacular survival from this adventure that had no prospective of salvation it would be quite appropriate, I would say.
That was how I encouraged myself as I held tight to the fairy charm hanging at my neck.

Our relentless march continued.

When noon came by, a faint headache came to me.

My mind felt heavier as I thought that I was at long last being struck by one of the symptoms of dehydration. Worse, wondering whether there was other damage besides the headache told me that I could not know, that my condition might have actually worsened and I just did not have any remembrance of that.

The inside of my mouth stung, making talking an annoyance, I felt heavy all over, I was hungry so my stomach stung badly, and the soles of my feet had long since started screaming out. I required thorough maintenance.

Assistant-san too, despite gulping down that water, did not seem really at ease.

Quite a bit of time had passed since pained breathing started coming without pause from behind me. Our stances as we walked slumped, and we were nearly dragging our feet as we moved.

This was a search we saw no end to. Honestly, we had nearly lost even the presence of mind that had us searching for water.

We headed downwards. That was all.

We turned corners in numbers nearly beyond count, withdrew, descended staircases.

At this point, we had no data on which to infer what height we were at.

Eating solid food, seriously, it was tiresome, and so we kept delaying even putting food in our mouths as we moved. There was no help from saliva, so biscuits and the likes we could not quite eat. We licked sickly-sweet honey as our thoughts only ran towards clean water.

This headache... it might be from excessive sugar intake. No, it should be normal for dehydration to cause headaches. The pain implanted in my head also induced a thumping ringing in my ears.

Eventually evening came, and the hours were of night.

Any place whatsoever did for our resting. I sat down, Assistant-san flopped down on his back, exhausted, and we could no longer move a muscle.

"Dinner... hydration..."

What a problem we had. We no longer had water for cooking, what remained was just our two canteens.

Let us calculate.

If we split one cup of soup we will have water remaining. Two cups... some we will necessarily have to drink. And if tomorrow we moistened our bodies before departing... it would be all gone.

"Ahhh my..."

A heavy reality leaned onto us.

Recalculate.

One cup of soup, one cup of water split between the two of us. We had leeway when it came to solid foods, no problems on the nourishment side. If we did that we would just barely have water remaining, and we should be able to moisten our throats tomorrow morning. In that case, the water we would drink on the way would be just about what remained at the bottom of the canteens—

"...all right, we go like this."

I understood it was not enough and that it was harsh, but there was no other way.

After eating, Assistant-san fell to sleep as if he had fainted. I was a little uneasy as to whether he would never wake back up again, so I gently combed his hair that used to be so fluffy – and now dried by oil and sweat and a lack of hydration.

"...ZZZ."

A sleeper's breath.

That was a relief, he was still alive.

Now I had to live, too.

I firmly charged the pocket flashlights, and because I was getting a cramp in my arm, I also fell quickly into a sleep as if I had fainted.

The next day.

We drank a little water at breakfast time, and Assistant-san's canteen was at this point empty.

"Today is game day."

That was what I told Assistant-san, who looked troubled, but there was no response. He remained sitting, doing nothing but dazedly staring at one point in the ground. What used to be wandering eyes had now sunk in and lacked luster. I had to do something, anything.

We could no longer attach any thought to our wandering a maze in the darkness. We only walked without obstructive thoughts, our hearts, our minds were empty.

If a device existed that could show one's mental imagery, it would certainly draw something with strong motifs of pain and thirst / paralyzed unease and terror / resignation and irritation.

Today I have been having a headache since I woke up. No matter how quietly we lowered our heels, every time we did a pain hard to bear struck my skull.

Thirst was at a level no longer ignorable.

It was like saliva had been withdrawn from within the mouth, the mandible hurt like the whole thing was inflamed.

On the way, we put crackers in our mouths as high-energy hiking food, then abandoned the plan.

This we already knew, but it was quite impossible to eat them. We could not swallow them.

"Times like these, even the sewage filling a chamberpot would be fine... perhaps?"

No, a chamberpot was no good, indeed. Good me said that.

Still, you could no longer be picky, indeed, so just drink up. That was the contrasting conclusion by Evil me.

Good. What if there are nasty disease-bringing bacteria, what will you do then? Today I had to endure and survive until tomorrow.

Evil. You will die anyway so it might be tomorrow or the day after that or whatever. Let us indulge in pleasure.

Good. Preposterous. Hope still remains to us, definitely!

Evil. That is the sort of stuff that has never existed, not even once, not since the day that

Heavens and Earth had been created!

Good. Such degeneracy! As if we could ever drink the filthy water that an unknown somebody had evacuated!

Evil. Then how about enjoying the watery content in what you eject from your own body?

...and that sort of unwanted delusions were the only things that came normally from my mind.

Incidentally, I would like to touch upon this 'watery content ejected from the body', as now that I had fallen into a slight bit of dehydration, I expected its concentration to have become extremely dense, and was likely impossible to purify back to drinkable levels with a simple water purifier, indeed.

The watch showed eleven.

It was only eleven!

I felt the passage of time as terribly slow. Whether this was the lifespan being prolonged via subjectivity or the lament of a pain that had lasted for so long depended on the person.

It was then that the pocket flashlights illuminated someone standing right in the middle of the passage.

"....."

The thing resembled a dog.

Except it was weird. There was no possible way that a dog would live in the center of metropolitan ruins with nothing whatsoever to eat. But one was there. Right now, before my eyes.

"Grrr."

It growled.

Assuming this was an illusion, it had made its appearance complete with auditory hallucinations.

It was about a middle-sized dog, I believed. I could not really confirm it, but I felt that he looked like a doberman or something. Combative, I could say...

Though it was certain that this was an illusion, that incessant growling awoke the survival instincts of both of us, wilting as we were. The hand went instinctively to the hips and drew a knife. I held a quite weighty blade before me, pointing it at the dog.

"W-, what is all this? A woof-woof?"

"Grrrrrrr."

The dog remained firmly materialized. It directed hostility our way, and might have leaped at us at any moment... it was a bundle of unreasonable aggression.

"I w-, will stab you, you know? I am serious, you know?"

"Grrr..."

A bit of a stare-off later, and the dog bobbed down its head, disappearing towards the opposite side of the passage.

"A-, an illusion, right? Ahahah..."

Well, whatever the reason, I had seen a dog and at present that entirely exhausted my willpower, seriously. That was because it was not certain that that dog would not be waiting for us in the direction in which we were advancing.

Eleven. We still had to hold on very very much in this hour. That said, I was nearly collapsing vertically.

Both Assistant-san and I, at that point, were – and therefore.

"...say, Assistant-san."

I talked to him skillfully, for having a wheezing voice that conveyed my pain.

"Could we have some tea, just the two of us?"

Our pained breathing stopped on the dot.

Rather than preserving ourselves with religious fervor and collapsing when push came to shove, maintaining our advance should have been better... but that was just the official stance.

"This is the last tea we will ever have..."

"...?"

"No, it is nothing."

The water we used for the tea was of course the content of our canteens. We boiled two cups' worth of water and the canteens had become nearly empty.

We tossed in tea bags and waited patiently. Whatever else, this was our Last Tea. Our last crusade. Not long and the scent came, and the stuffy smell of the cramped corridor was quickly chased away. An instant that felt like our cracked-dry hearts were regaining their liveliness.

"Well, please do."

"....."

Assistant-san shifted his gaze between my face and the cup several times then, hesitatingly, put the cup to his mouth like he was sorry about it.

Then, me too... but when I lifted my cup to my lips, I found a foreign substance mixed within it. It was the charm made from twisted paper. I put my hand to my neck and the string that should have been there was not. It seems that it had severed without my noticing.

"T-, the fairy charm..."

I was about to take that secret sustenance for my heart out of the cup when I stiffened.

In the instant I took my eyes off it, the twisted paper string displayed surprising absorption, and sucked in the whole cup of tea. My Last Tea!

That said, the strangeness did not end there.

The charm had changed completely... something resembling a muffin, sitting neat and comfortable within the cup, abruptly lifted itself up.

"Eeek!"

I tossed it away.

The color green that had drained from the cup fell to the ground with a *plump* and was squished flat.

"It drank the tea... it is alive!"

Those were words of incomprehensible meaning, if I said so myself.

"After that dog, this blubbery green thing, then..."

Sigh, that was a development that happened many times in those game-style paperbacks that I mentioned earlier. They were monsters that you fought in the dungeons, that sort of things. But at present I did not have dice. I refused to fight. That said, the opponent right now was a teensy thing. Maybe I could defeat it easily?

As my heart pounded hard, I pointed my light at it.

"Yessah!"

The green roundish blubbery thing had lifted itself up and turned into the shape of a fairy.

"...in other words, you turned into a charm?"

"Yes, I metamorphed."

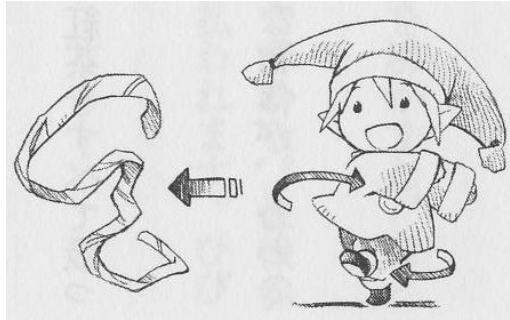
An excited fairy well stocked with watery content answered.

"B-, by doing what?"

"Twisting?"

Twisting.

It did give me an image like they were wringing out their water content, but...



"You twisted yourself until you became twisted paper?"

"Until a state of suspended animation."

Until he got into a state of suspended animation, he said...

Still, by doing so, he had gained the resistance required to exist even in a world where microwaves were cast down hard and firm.

"I have this feeling that among microorganisms capable of living in all sorts of environment there were some that had that ability..."

"You praise me, I'm obliged and a bit embarrassed!"

"Huh? But did you people not say that microwaves were dangerous?"

That was why they came to return to their hometown, I believe.

"It feels safe!"

"Why?"

"There are no waves in here!"

"Ahh... right... I see."

The transmission device could not connect either, that was how it was.

The fairy looked around at this stifling place with deep interest.

"Is this a confined space?"

"Indeed, it is as narrow as narrow can be. There are also creatures like wild dogs. And there is no more water."

"Puppies!"

"Come now, really!"

"People like us are easy for dogs to eat!"

"And now you are being preyed upon?!"

"Cats just bite, and after biting they don't eat..."

They had made their way through a pretty sad history indeed, these people.

"...this is bad, this is not the time to indulge in talking."

The therapeutic effect of a fairy was too great, and I came to forget entirely about the crisis here at present.

"Is talking to the likes of us a waste of time?"

"I am not saying that, I am not saying that much," I tried to stop his self-torture with a smile.

"Uhm, you see, we have no drinking water."

"Water?" The fairy tilted his head in puzzlement. "That can be made with the dream collaboration between oxygen and hydrogen, see?"

"Maybe it can be."

"And those are everywhere?"

"...I understand that they exist anywhere on this Earth, but... there is none here."

"Ah." He seemed to be choosing his words, then "I smell water, though?"

"Eh? You smell it?"

He had blurted out that he could perceive the smell of water right then and there.

"Might be this way."

We walked.

It was in the direction towards which that dog had gone. I was a little contrary. Still.

"We go!"

The choice was just one. Shoulder our bags and follow the fairy as he sniffed audibly with his nose.

"What do you think about this room?"

We opened a creaking door and found a ruined room.

In this room with no windows, but plenty of feeling locked in, there was machinery that looked like measurement devices tossed around in large numbers as well as haphazardly. All of them looked like they came from ancient times, and I could not see a piece of machinery that was working. As natural, there would be no person who would think that there was water in this room.

The fairy skipped over the mountain of scrap with agility and stood on its top.

"I am sorry, but there appears to be no water in here at all."

"That's wrong, you know?"

"Well,"

His tiny body flew inside a gap in the scrap and I could no longer see him.

"Diii-scoved!"

"You lie."

"I can't open the lid, but you only need to open it, then you can drink."

Well, if that was not a way of speaking oddly filled with conviction. This bothered me.

However, removing this garbage would be laborious. My stamina was already well into its limits.

"The machinery weighs on it and is pushing down the lid. I am sorry, but we cannot quite remove it."

"But you know it's here, right here!"

It could be possible that water was actually there. A forgotten canteen, something like that.

But moving this mountain of piled machinery, well...

"..."

Assistant-san stepped forwards. I read a faint change in his facial expression, it was a face that said he had a plan.

"W-, what are you going to do?"

He had a solid looking iron pipe in hand, the kind he could have procured anywhere. He then approached the mountain of scrap, focused his eyes, walked around, and finally suddenly thrust the pipe deep inside.

"Ahhh... you are using the principles of a lever?"

The boy confirmed it by thrusting up his thumb. Will it go that smoothly, however.

"Mister fairy, we will try to move it a little so please come out."

"Aye aye!"

He leaped out like a flea, landing on my shoulder.

"...you stink of tea."

"The public is being a little harsh, is it?"

But that was enough, indeed, for now...

"That is fine. But be careful."

Assistant-san put his body weight on the pipe and the instrument things near the top tilted, then all too easily collapsed. That was one of them, the fairy indicated.

"You may now open it!" The fairy went with a kingly tone like that.

"You ask us to open it, but..."

On the other side of a problematic measuring instrument there was a lid. It was built such that it could be slid when pushed and easily opened. Fitting snugly inside was a small black box, which had the shape of a generic battery.

And, when I tried holding the black battery in my hand, I heard a faint watery sound.

"Assistant-san, may I ask for a receptacle?"

A cup was served to me instinctively, and I tilted in something that looked like a draining nozzle that I had twisted open... and water came out.

"Oh my!"

It was an amount that did not fill a cup to full, but it was certainly water.

"It does not even have a nasty smell."

"It's really clean."

"..."

Assistant-san held the purification device.

We should purify it, just in case. We poured the water into the purifier's tube and passed it through the filter with something that worked like a syringe. It was done quickly.

"Now then."

To be honest, I no longer cared whether there were weird microorganisms, or rather, I wanted to sink into pleasure just for this moment. I gulped it down, sending the contents down my throat.

"....."

My deep emotions were stolen away.

Drinking water used to be a normal act. Deprived of that, I had lost the rightful joy of it. I now understood very well how dried up my body was. I thought of giving half to Assistant-san, but even that consideration had been blown away as I drank it down fully in one go.

"...delicious, marvelous."

"Master human wished for water!"

"Exactly. Say, mister fairy, are there others like these perhaps?"

"There aren't any here, it seems, but that said..."

He leaped down from my shoulder and landed in the now dried cup.

"You can stay on my shoulder, you know?"

"Suppose there was something really scary..."

The fairy's expressionless smile clouded faintly, and he spoke like he was revealing a terrifying secret.

"...I might be able to provide water?"

"If you are implying the 'watery content ejected from the body' then I will pass, so feel free to wet yourself, please."

"But you will drink, right?"

"No, I believe there is a much better way."

I tied the fairy with a string and dangled him from the front of my pocket flashlight.

"Dangling all danglily is my lot in life."

As we walked, the fairy swayed left and right like a pendulum.

"Does it feel like there is water?"

"...nothing here!"

Dowsing was a 'scientific'-like technique that used a metal rod or a pendulum's motions to discover underground water and gold deposits. Dowsing was seemingly of no use, to put it mildly, but as far as this Fairy Dowsing that I had invented went, I had as much faith in it as I would have in a parent that showed up when their children were fighting.

"Maybe this way."

We turned at the diverging roads by following the indications of the fairy, and quickly discovered a staircase.

"This is so nice. This feeling of ease that says we are following the correct route, that is."

"..."

I still felt a little heavy, but my willpower at least had accelerated. That headache had also somehow grown distant, and I had no symptoms such as nausea or diarrhea. As long as we had a fairy with, we probably still had plenty of chances to survive.

"Next this way?"

"This way it is."

At that point there were no mistakes in the choice of routes. There should be no fatal mistakes in the things that the fairies did (or so I would have liked to think, and earnestly so). We were going to do nothing except advance and nothing except discovering abundant sources of water.

"If there is a nice big puddle somewhere, please let us know ahead of time. We would warmly welcome battery water like the one from before, as well."

"It's a privilege to be of use!"

I have never felt so happy for being in good relations with the fairies as I was now.

Our party continued to descend at a pace we had never had thus far, and eventually we managed to have our eyes drawn by a new development.

"Well now!"

I reflexively shouted out.

Not two hundred meters of walking after the last staircase we came to some sort of massive area. Remember that park we passed in the beginning, which was all benches and grass? This was a space with the same arrangement. No, I could actually assert that this was a block made to the exact same standard.

The sole discrepancy was that the illumination was brightly turned on.

The path we came from seemed to be blocked off by some fence, but its rusted and rotten wire mesh had already collapsed down flat. We very easily went over it.

".....?"

"Come now, what is the problem? We have the blessings of civilization at last, you see?"

I called at Assistant-san, who was very intently staring at the remnants of the fence, and he interrupted his surveying, straightened his back, and ran over.

"There is no need to run, it is a waste of energy, you see..."

...he seemed to have become more obedient than before. And that despite how he was normally like a doll.

It was not just the lighting that was alive, I could see the vestiges of something that smelled of life.

An abandoned bicycle, packing material that had transmuted and had fused with the ground, a peddler's wagon that had toppled sideways, a single shoe abandoned there, empty cans that had turned into mere rust as time passed—

"This is a place where people used to live, and no mistake."

I started walking, and picked up a paperback that had been discarded while still open. It did not have the feel of paper, it felt like torn cotton in my hands. Its fabric was now so tattered that the book all too easily crumbled starting from the part that I touched.

"...this is old."

I wondered how much time had passed.

The length of time that it took for something to preserve its shape, yet dry up to the point it crumbled when touched, was impossible for us to imagine.

It was possible that this park was older than the first thing in it. Beyond it was all clearly half-finished, only this side had actual signs of having been used.

"Right, the whole of the city is built with chains of blocks, that is how it is..."

Although explaining it as playing with wooden blocks would have been much too rude.

Piling up the facility blocks, the pipes that made for corridors ran lengthwise and crosswise... thinking about it, I had a feeling like the elevator was also an extension of that technology.

No, let us leave the thinking for later.

"Mister fairy, where is the water? It is just that we would like to get our hands on quite a little within the day, if possible."

"It's all squirming around nearby."

"Squirming? Nearby?"

"Aye, it's movey-moving, it's moving water."

"Moving water." I could do nothing but repeat these simple yet marvelous words. "Is that maybe a river... or a water main? Which corner is that in?"

"That one."

"We go! Assistant-san, we have water and light!"

We crossed the park, plunging onwards as we followed the fairy's guide.

There was a corridor so large that two wheeled vehicles could be driven side by side. For us, who had been forced to walk stuffy passages for several days, there was something special in this invigorating sensation of walking freely.

Happily, the illumination was also working. Upholstery had been installed in the walls and ceilings without leaving a single empty spot, which gave us a sighed sense of deep relief.

"But the lack of green gives me the sense that something is missing."

"Green!"

The fairy, now released from its dowsing role (there seemed to be no more need for it), pointed at himself.

"Not the color green... koff!"

Though I was overflowing with willpower, the thirst of a dry mouth remained most certainly hard to bear. But thinking that we would soon find a source of water fit under the category of 'doing my best'.

"You too, Assistant-san, we still need a little bit of patience – what is up with that?"

"..." he pointed at a direction without words.

"What? It was lying over there? That thing?"

He was holding a black stone plank about thirty centimeters in size... though it feels like I had seen it somewhere before...?

"...was that not what had fallen in the field before?"

The first thing I thought was that Assistant-san had been carrying that around all along. But I quickly rejected that. After all, I did prepare his baggage. His sacks quite lacked the space to fit a monolith.

Did it really fell?

"Could you show it to me for a moment, please?"

It was similar...

Being that we were within a city, I expected this was not created in the present generation.

The same thing remained here and there as relics, and one among them got stabbed into that field... naaah.

On the bottom of the monolith, small enough that it was impossible to tell without looking closely, a geometrical cavity had been drilled in.

"Now just what is this... it does not seem like a crack that happened coincidentally."

Howevemuch I thought, I could not tell. As I was done with inspecting the monolith, Assistant-san smoothly snatched it and returned it to within his folded arms.

"Are you taking that with you?"

"..."

Assistant-san gave me eyes like he was timidly questioning me.

"...feel free. It is not a heavy item, after all."

"Water here?"

The fairy was making tiny hops a few meters ahead in the passageway. Right next to him, scientific debris was gathered at the side of the wall, as if saying that this here was the stocking area for large-sized trash.

"What? Uhm, where?"

Not a single thing connected to water existed within my sights.

"In there."

Where the fairy pointed at, there was something wobbling.

It was clinging to a cracked monitor. Like a cabbageworm hugged onto fresh grass.

Have you ever seen the real version of the diagram of the single-cell organism called an amoeba? They often appear in hallucinations, you see. It may have looked something like that. It had the physical composition of jelly pulled taut into a fava bean, and was jiggling as it wobbled. Color was a semitransparent green. Inside the body it was holding something spherical the size of a tennis ball.

That it was a clump of water was not a mistake. But, how to say it, it was utterly wrong.

Anyone who kindly asked for water and found that served would think so.

"W-, what is that thing?"

"In our style that's water?"

"He does not think this is water at all, that person... they are a much more dangerous and wild, a fragment of the terror from outer space that had destroyed this city, that is what... an evil god, that is what it feels like."

"That's right!"

We are reeeally calm here, are we!

The suspicious green creature showed off a bouncing leap and landed right next to us.

Splitch.

"EeeK! EEEK!"

I hurried and stumbled, and took distance nearly on all fours. However, the creature once again danced in the air and flew, targeting me.

"NOOOOOO!"

I also displayed a super-reaction that was implausible even for myself, tumbled, and escaped by a hair's width.

I took out the knife.

Another Flying Body Press attack came.

"HYYYYYYYYYH!"

I did nothing but flail about.

The creature wobbled at fixed intervals. Even if at a glance nothing seemed different, the thing seemed to possess both liquid and solid states, and by wobbling it sort of like stored extreme force within its body.

That was why the jump came when the wobbling had stopped.

Then it has to be right after it has landed!

Fourth attack. I evaded it by rolling forwards as hard as I could, quickly redressed my stance, and stabbed the knife I held in both hands into the creature.

Schlup, went the blade as it entered inside the creature. I absolutely did not want to touch it, so I instinctively let go of it. Only the knife was very visible in its semitransparent body.

And now I no longer had a weapon.

"...uhmmm..."

The creature also seemed surprised, as it stopped moving. I examined it closely, and... bubbles had begun forming around the blade, and they were melting it, were they not. I remembered a school experiment in which we melted iron scraps with acid.

Awww, the handle part was already melting into some kind of sludge, indeed. Yes, it was melting. Amoebas and the sort had that kind of characteristic, indeed. They melted stuff within them and the like. If they attacked people... then they wanted to melt the meat, correct?

Thinking that, a shiver ran down my spine.

The fairy said this cheerfully.

"Waaah, there's lots of them coming!"

A countless number of the creature's friends gathered from the latticed iron boards installed everywhere in the passage.

"We must run away."

I grabbed Assistant-san's hand, faced the corridor and dashed.



Not withdrawing towards the park was a good decision, if I said so myself. However, there was that thing about our physical health, the burden was intense, my breath was ragged, I had nausea, and that unpleasant sensation that blood was just up and draining from my whole body was increasing. But I did not stop.

I ran, and ran—

"Bleeegh!"

On the way I could just not hold it back, and threw up at the side of the road.

Awww, my water, my electrolytes...

It was lucky that I did not collapse exhausted from this shock, given how my mental strain was at its utmost limits.

Having finished throwing up I glanced behind, and found lots of colorful rashes, green and black and red and blue, that seemed to be wobbling, which made my heart nearly stop.

I did my best about the nauseating feeling in my mouth and once again began to run.

"F'nyah! H'nyah!"

What sort of noises was I even making, really.

Eventually the harshness at least disappeared, and I fell into the delusion that my body had become light. The narrowing of the field of view, typical of anemia, occurred, and there was something like a lump stuck in my chest. My knees lost the strength to support me, and my lower body sank. Naturally, my consciousness too was on the verge of vanishing.

And then, well, I fainted.

It was a blunder of mine to not quite notice the fact that that I had collapsed face up and was facing the ceiling.

"...dear me!"

I felt sluggish and could not even lift one finger.

I had collapsed in the corridor, but what happened next?

What about those creatures?

It did not look like I was melted, and so...?

Ahhh, the ceiling was quite low, indeed. It was sort of different from the passage's. Then I might have been carried in a different place. Right, what about Assistant-san? Also, I thought there had been a fairy. And a communication device. There definitely was water, too. The pillow was so hard! I really loved soft fluffy pillows. My thoughts were all shaking about. How about this lighting, hm? The whole of the ceiling was dazedly shining. Inexplicable. But a little bit dazzling.

I closed my eyes.

The sound of shoe steps was approaching. It was getting closer and closer. I then felt someone standing right next to me. I had to launch an SOS. My eyelids would no longer lift. Who was it I did not know, but I declared this with shivering lips.

"S'oss."

'ats wrong, wann't. What would I do if I was abandoned?

In the first place, what did SOS even mean. Humm, right, rescue me! If the person next to me was Grandfather, maybe he might save me.

"Grandfather... water..."

No good, it was just impossible for me to talk. I wanted to fall. I fell.

Something hard was pushed at my lips, and I felt that I did not quite like that, but quickly a cold liquid slipped out, and so I released my consciousness while I opened my throat wide and frantically—

"...oh."

Next time I woke up, my consciousness also felt refreshed.

"Even my health has returned..."

No headache no pain no nausea. There was still a little thirst, but it was not as it previously was. I was tremendously hungry, but that was not at dangerous levels.

I lifted my upper body and tried to comprehend this situation.

First, I was laying on what seemed to be a large desk. There was no one. Not the owner of the place, certainly, but I could not even spot Assistant-san or the fairy.

And so this was a room that left me the impression of being somewhat vast. The upholstery was patterned in the grain of wood. It seemed that this large space where several members of a family could live had been subdivided by on-rails curtains, but the cloth partitions had rotten away and were now darkening the floor in large heaps.

"Is this a living space in the city...?"

There were several bookshelves in a row next to the wall. They were almost entirely empty. There were two doors of different sizes, and on the wall on the opposite side of the bookshelves I could see a tiny spiral staircase worming its way upstairs.

"To infer, this is a residence, maybe?"

It was not a businesslike place. It tried to be as warm as possible, that was the space this was.

I opened the smaller door. There was a flush toilet and a bathroom.

Just touching the handle to flush the water made it easily tilt. The water storage tank was empty inside. As a test I tried lifting the lid—

"Sediments!"

I screamed out as my urge told me to.

"Cambrian period! Ordovician period! Silurian period! Uhhmm and then there was... the Cretaceous period?"

I shouted all sorts as I lowered the toilet seat.

I felt history. I saw a heap of something that had taken a long time to coagulate.

Like... well, a fossil, see?

Please treat that scream as coming from being highly impressed.

Forgetting the hard reality, I decided to rummage around the room.

"There is nothing."

The near totality of utensil had become brittle and did not appear to have been used. There were several beautiful tea sets in the shelves, but they were broken and chipped and personally speaking they did not count as having found anything worthy of note.

There were several electrical appliances, but they did not seem to be working.

The only thing alive was the illumination.

I tried opening the larger door.

"Bwah, it is so dark..."

On the other side there was a corridor of the same make as the one we wandered about in the beginning. Lightning had nearly died.

"It is like a residential district, indeed."

Left and right in the corridor there were doors lined pretty close to each other. The partitioning was like that of an apartment building. As I did not have the patience to examine them one by one, I returned to the room for the moment.

Suddenly, the things used in the stead of bedding on top of the desk struck my eyes.

"The pillow, I thought it was hard, but..."

It seems that I had used that monolith in the stead of pillow.

Without anything particular in mind I took it in hand, and wanting to take a rest I sat down on the wicker chair... and its bottom fell out and I struck my posterior on the ground.

"OwChChChCh...!"

Organic items had become brittle and were no longer usable, I see. I simply had to pay attention already.

Which meant that the staircase which led to the second floor, being made of wood, was a little scary. I put a foot on it, but when I tried putting my weight on there was a sudden creaking sound. I prudently tested its robustness as I headed upwards.

The mood upstairs was again different.

It was tremendously narrow. A small room.

Doors were in three spots, one was a washroom, one was a place sort of like a waiting room, one led to a room of (maybe) medical equipment the size of the coffin placed in its depths.

There was just walls, the layout seemed the same as the floor below.

"So, at the end of things, this is an examination room."

The feeling of a hospital just did not change no matter the age, indeed.

Mixed with the chairs and bottles and ampules scattered in the room there was a sad-looking folded stretcher. Wonder what was the last time it was used...

Next to a steel desk with a coating of dust (one centimeter thick) applied to it, which may well be called the substantiation of the ages that have passed, there was a flat-type monitor left there doing nothing, which reminded me of the mood of that time since past.

A black solid hand-sized (cubic) unit was set right next to it, and this was likely the computer's main body itself, I would say. Lacquered, it was a product in Eastern taste.

Without much expectation I switched the computer on.

No response.

"What else."

Even if outside it was in one piece, it often happens that the life span within was expended.

"Ah, the power cable is disconnected, however."

Following the power cable extending from the unit, I found that it was disconnected from the outlet.

I try plugging it in and,

Beep—

"...it turned on."

Try and maybe succeed.

Bo-beep—

Coincidentally the monitor itself seemed to have automatically turned on.

"Oooh, they are linked, I see."

And this despite the monitor and the computer not being physically linked, what else from the amazing science of the distant past. I saw it as a device that, through a wireless technology or something of that sort, accessed all compatible monitors that it detected in the room. The light on the cube machine was blinking restlessly.

"Now then, what information do we have here."

I eagerly waited in front of the monitor, but there was no startup screen displayed at all.

".....mh?"

"We're back!"

Right at that moment, the fairy and Assistant-san returned.

"Ah, you two... what a relief."

Assistant-san drew up next to me and asked me this with his eyes.

"... (translation: are you all right now?)"

"Indeed, thank you Assistant-san. You really saved me. I will put a flower seal on your stamp card, I will."

He seemed happy.

"Ah, you two... where have you been until now?"

"To get water," went the fairy.

Assistant-san offered me a canteen. I took it in hand and found it nicely heavy.

"So it was... that while I was out you went and searched for water."

"..."

"What? Drink it? I go first?"

My throat still hurt by a far from satisfied thirst. Still.

"You have a terrible face too, Assistant-san. I can still bear it for the moment, so you go first, please."

I pushed the canteen back. He had an awkward face, but I smiled brightly as I watched him, so he carefully put it to his mouth and gulped several times.

Assistant-san drank about half, the rest I received. When the ecstasy of water pervading my body finished, I had regained energy enough to get back to the search.

"Whew, now I feel calmer."

"You're the right age for that?"

"That kind of 'calming down' is a little different... what about water for you, mister fairy?"

"We don't really enjoy that kind of past-times."

The inhabitants of the world of magic would be like this.

"If it's weird, I'll give the past-time a try?"

"It is fine, it is fine."

Whichever the way, dry things were hard on us, so we presented him with a whole biscuit. As a reward for discovering water it was on the cheap, so there was no need for a big brouhaha about it.

"A reward that really fills me up!"

He was really happy. He began intently eating it.

"..."

Assistant-san's interest was drawn by the monitor.

"Ahhh, this is, you see. It worked so I thought I would investigate it, but nothing is displaying."

The screen yet remained black.

"....."

Assistant-san seemed to sink into thought for a moment, then he stretched his hands towards the terminal-like things distributed parallel on the lower part of the monitor and began messing about with them. His hands moved with no hesitation, which had to have been the result of the books on computer technology that Grandfather had him read. There was now a blue screen displayed on the monitor.

"Oh dear, you are quite something."

Seems that it was a problem of settings, then.

"Can we investigate what it contains?"

"..."

He pulled out a keyboard that had to be laying somewhere and tried using it. His hands moved of course lightly... or to put it more seriously, unskillfully. But he seemingly managed to input the correct commands, as the bland blue screen vanished and the design-like, refined background switched to a green screen.

Refined, the volume of information increased all at once.

"This looks quite complicated, indeed."

The system did appear to be easily controllable by intuitive commands, but the troublesome complications that arose from the many possibilities computing permitted were on their own beyond our skills. With each input the screen split into smaller ones, and on each of those screens enormous amounts of information were displayed in reduced form.

It seemed the subscreens could be enlarged, placed at one's preferred location and size, and the data in them could be selected in part and extracted, meaning this was a system made for parallel controlling of this intense coming and going of complex display frames.

What to even say, the thing was in a real hurry. People of the past truly had no time to spare, indeed.

Eventually the display fixed on a specific screen.

"...?"

"Let me see."

It seemed to be a page in which the owner of the computer had picked out all the media reports that they were interested in and summarized them. The electronic information version of newspaper clips.

It was mainly about government this and that, and medical technology this and that, and being I had no context nor did I possess the common knowledge of that period of time, they were all things that went beyond my understanding, and reading them was difficult. Picking up just the meaning of the headlines and of what I could understand I managed to grasp a general outline.

"It was massive and perhaps it should have been called a country, but... it appears that making additions to buildings in order to increase living space was normal for this city. It seems that problems arising from haphazard increase in buildings were the norm, but still they piled exterior building over exterior building..."

There was a town, urbanization had advanced, and eventually it turned into a high-rise. The expansion of the city progressed by clearing out vast wildlands, I did not believe the enlargement went like the smearing of a layer of cream on pound cake.

The maze we had been wandering in was the result of remodeling construction, born as the result of the city's structure having become massive.

Among the clips could be seen articles about the new technologies used to expand the construction of the building from the inside, the unease towards the structural solidity and the increasing burden that inevitably came as consequence of being so massive, and shrill criticism towards the meandering city planning.

"But there is still something I do not understand, you see?"

"Try saying? Try saying?"

"...now that we say it, this was an indoor country, that is what it will come to."

"Town-wide hikikomoris, huh."

"No question regarding that ever came up... it really seems that that wasn't among the clips. Things like moving the capital, or securing the required land, there were no motions whatsoever in those regards. This is a question mark. It is like—"

"...?"

"Like they were afraid of going outside."

Right then, the display blinked off and vanished.

"What happened? Did it die?"

Although the boy's fingers rushed madly on the keyboard, I could see no sign that it was going to return. The light indicating operation below the monitor section had also switched off.

"It does seem like the source of power itself has cut off."

Maybe it got disconnected from the power socket? I tried leaning over. There was something weird on the floor. Something that was not there before.

"...well now."

Size was that of a curled-up cat. Color was black. Shape was that of a squished a sphere with something that could fit in the resulting cavity.

And, for some reason, the power cable extending from that pedestal (?) had monopolized the power outlet.

"Mister fairy... could you unplug the computer and plug it into that odd thing instead?"

"No!"

"Really?"

"Yes! It's not in the memories of my secretary!"

A secretary, have we.

Regardless, not only did it easily disconnect the computer's power cable, it burned off about three centimeters from the tip side.

So where did that plug part disappear to...? For some reason, the cable connecting the pedestal to the outlet was exactly three centimeters long, it was indeed.

Did someone burn off the power plug of this computer and connect it to this pedestal?

In an instant? Really, now?

A fairy would be able to do it, but,

"Who Are You to my secretary?"

What was he even trying to say now?

With just one fairy there should be no display of their proud supertechnology. Without them gathering in groups, their explosive intellectual power should never show up. He was not the culprit.

"It feels sort of squishy!"

The pedestal had the tactile sensation of plastic with a little springiness to it.

"If it's too squishy, will you still mess with it?"

"What sort of 'messing with' would that be?"

"Charging possible. Please place the device on top of the nearby docking station. Charging possible. Please place the device—"

It was a voice message from the transmission device that I had left thrust in my pocket.

"It said docking station?"

I thought of how there was only one device connected to electricity, and...

"This?"

The fairy made a landing on the dark pedestal.

"Apparently. It seems I just need to put the device on this indentation..."

I tried doing just that.

The indicator that showed battery charge recovered right as I watched. Just being

technologies close to each other in eras gave them quite the high scientific affinity, it seemed. The battery was filled in a few minutes.

"We will now be fine no matter when we will be next able to communicate."

I tried inspecting the pedestal coming out of the power plug... this charging dock, but I could not spot any maker logo nor any kind of information plate.

"What a mystery..."

It cannot be that it has the ability to walk of its own strength and plug into sockets or something? Thinking about the technological skills of this indoor culture it seemed possible, but... come on, now.

Someone had torn off the power cable from the computer and connected it to the dock.

"Is this a locked room mystery?"

"Well, I do understand what you are trying to say."

The mystery was suddenly solved.

The next instant, still in my arms, the charging dock lost its solidity and melted into a soft, jelly form. That creepy figure, wobbling slightly, was nothing I could ever forget. The only thing that was allowed to wobble like that was actually jelly or pudding.

"This is one of those monsters from before, is it not! Everybody, run!"

I dumped the thing and ran. I impacted with Assistant-san, who was headed for the waiting room's door at the same time, and tumbled. The black jellified creature use that as the right chance to leap out into the air.

"?!"

The jelly creature flew at us nearly in slow motion. I picked up what I had nearby, lost control of myself, and waved it about. The wonderful power of coincidence drew the blunt weapon right onto the creature. A perfect, direct hit.

With the blunt weapon still stuck in itself, the black creature squirmed violently. It oozed at a crawl towards the side of the wall, desperate to insert its plug into the socket... but that was where things ended for it.

"D-, did I defeat it? Did I?"

"...! ...!"

Seeing this struggle, Assistant-san clapped his hands really hard.

"Hahahah... thank you..."

"Even your science is interesting, master human!"

The fairy appeared excited about the creature.

"Please do not discuss that, I am begging you..."

It was possible it was not entirely dead, and I had neither the guts nor the weapon to deal a final hit into something I had intentionally repelled.

"And the weapon... silly me, fighting with that thing."

The monolith had been stabbed into the creature. Having that thing stabbed into the head, a normal human would die. It appeared that even that creature could not just 'gulp down' something bigger than itself, like it did with the knife.

"Sigh, the job of watching out for one's life is difficult..."

If I did not rest I would not be able to take one single further step.

Assistant-san brought the baggages from the floor below, and we had our meal there.

"That water back there, I wish we had taken a little bit with us."

The fairy, silly him, pointed at the creature's corpse.

"The ingredient-like stuff of that thing is water, you know?"

So he might say, but, well...

Healing both our thirst and appetite, our willpower finally recovered.

"Well then, let us depart, all right?"

I lifted up the pocket flashlight like a conductor's baton as I announced that. It was on that moment that someone inside the room became a gust of wind and leaped. There was a thud, a dull sensation on my pocket flashlight.

"Well now?"

"...!"

Assistant-san emitted a thin shriek that did not become voice.

A dog?

It was certainly a dog.

Standing in the center of the room with four legs, it was still facing the direction it had landed at, pointing his tail at us. It was some tail. It was so sharp it might have been used in the stead of a spear. Slowly turning around, the dog chewed into shreds what it had in the mouth, and fragments of the pocket flashlight scattered on the ground.

I brought what I had in my hand nearer to my eyes and found that for some reason it was in shreds.

"...d-, did it bite it off?"

It had become half its length.

"Ahhh!" The fairy shouted out. "It's a mecha dog!"

Dog it might have been a dog, but it was a robot dog.



First the slimes, now robots?!

Out of the frying pan and into the fire, that was what this was.

With Assistant-san still behind my back, I could not move one step. The mecha dog approached. Though its sleek body was quite refined, its oral cavity alone felt like it belonged to something else, as it was an industrial-strength crushing machine. A highly expensive toy robot remodeled into having combat capabilities... that was sort of how it looked like.

"Grrr," the dog growled.

"The mecha dog just wants to play with you, master human?"

No, my dear mister fairy, that was killer instinct.

I felt it highly possible that if I turned back to escape, it would jump on me right away.

I wondered whether the fairy might juuust save us but with one alone that might juuust be impossible and that was my honest thought yes indeed. I pushed Assistant-san with my back, pressing him into the door. If at least him alone could escape... he would be able to apologize to Grandfather.

The dog opened his mouth wide, and its industrial shredder, smeared with oil, made an intense back and forth motion.

P-, painful... that looks quite painful!

And then, the dog creature manifested a ferociousness beyond my ability to describe and leaped at us!

"NOOOO!"

Shriveling in shock, I covered my face. It was all over. It was the end. This was goodbye.

Inside my mind, Grandfather was asking with a gentle voice. You had a nice life, right? No, to be honest it was really... ahhh, pain was truly harsh, indeed. If I could at least have an instant death it would have been better, though. ...that said, how it did not quite hurt was odd. Could it be that I have already died?

I slowly tried opening my eyes.

"Growl!"

"HYH!"

The industrial shredder was in full operation right before my eyes. But... the fangs stopped there, I escaped being chewed by a hair's breadth.

Why?

Because there was someone behind the dog, grasping its tail and pulling backwards.

"....."

Surprisingly enough, it was a young girl.

Years of age were fourteen or fifteen. Petite. A long scarf. At her breast a badge with the letter 'P', and then peculiar... or rather symbolic... cat-type ears. Truth was, what drew my sights more were her eyes, stoically tranquil as if she had made her own resolve.

I remember seeing her before.

In the village. Not long ago. On the first day of the festival.

It was that girl who was searching for someone.

That very girl had for some reason appeared inside the room and was grabbing with one hand the tail of the robot dog that was about to eat me, that was what happened.

The dog struggled violently and tried to move forwards and forwards, but the girl did not even so much as flinch.

I did not know how many tens of thousands horsepower the robot dog's strength was, still this suggested she had quite the superhuman strength, did it not?

That said, this was a situation in which thanking her for saving us was difficult at the present point in time.

"Ah, excuse me?"

This was all about me being too eager for the 'twist' part of the typical structure of a story.

"You have supplied me with a source of electricity, you have my sincere gratitude."

The girl said that with a low voice.

A source of electricity?

There was only one thing that I could think of from that term, and that was, at present, plugged into the outlet and turned into the shape of a saucer. The monolith that I had stabbed into it earlier had disappeared.

...meaning it did not die, then?

"G-, gratitude?"

"It is my intention to return that favor with all of my self."

And that was why she was going to stop the dog, right? That would be a good thing, right. I wished she would do that, right. If she did not I would die.

"W-, we would be much obliged."

From her head came an electric sound like a 'ding'. Ventriloquism?

"Then I shall disassemble this impertinent and low-functionality ground machine."

"C-, can you do that?"

"Yes, it is possible."

As she said that, I heard a mechanical engine noise emitted from the whole of the the young girl. It was like... a lot of motors had begun moving all at once, right. It was a sound that made me feel an odd relief, or rather, reliability.

"Beginning mission!"

Following along with hand motions that resembled a salute, the robot dog was extremely easily peeled off of the ground. It was slammed down on the opposite side in the same motion. With ease such that I hesitated to explain this with the mere words 'superhuman strength'.

"You are like heavy machinery, I see..."

"Growl!"

The robot dog was quite robust, so it nimbly lifted itself up and revolved. It prepared a ferocious attack with the young girl as its new objective. Fangs that were brutality itself aimed for her neck as concealed by her scarf.

"...hmpf."

The young girl displayed marvelous motions. She went backwards, one tiny step piled onto another, and successfully avoided the robot dog's attacks by the breadth of a sheet of paper. Her vertically extended palm struck upwards, cutting air and aimed for the dog's throat.

A direct hit!

The mecha dog spun in the air, flipped over so easily that it felt like some joke. The inertia with which it had lunged was not abated by the impact coming from below, so it was still flapping its legs as it smashed into the wall.

"Dear me, that was wonderful!"

"As the calculations of the reaction due to impact appeared to be insufficient, posture control was incomplete... this is really hard."

She seemed to be bothered by her slight staggering after the counterattack.

"...whine!"

Having concluded it could not win, the robot dog lowered its ears and attempted to take flight from the waiting room door.

"I will not let you escape!"

Her long scarf waved even without anything touching it and extended with good force. Its end came apart and transformed into a web, becoming like a cast net and enveloping the robot dog.

"CaIN!"

The robot dog, tangled in the net, flipped over. The young girl gripped the root of the scarf and nimbly pulled it to her feet.

"This shall be the final blow."

She trampled it. Powdered it. Myyy, this was cruel!

Completely shattered, the robot did not move anymore. Happily ever after, happily ever after.

Peace, peace. Destruction, destruction.

After a bow with her heels stuck together, the young girl declared this.

"Destruction of enemy low-functionality land machine confirmed. Mission complete!"

"Well, thank you, you saved us..."

Who was this girl?

"...you do not remember? Ahhh, you did say that."

As there was space to settle down in the reception room, we moved there and spoke to each other.

Assistant-san and the fairy put their fear of strangers on display and only juttled out half their faces from the room where we were in earlier, peeking at us. Speaking truthfully I also wanted to be among them, but... at the moment I could do little but accomplish my role of representative.

"Something of that sort. It's worrisome."

"I remember that you were searching for a comrade, right?"

"That alone isn't mistaken."

"Uhm, I understand it is rude to say this, but..."

"Speak."

"You just do not seem to be very human-like, are you."

I noticed that I was functionally badmouthing her only after I had said that.

"...I myself have this very vague feeling of that."

Very vague, have we.

"No, in the end, what I am is a mere soldier."

She declared that vigorously.

"A soldier, is it? I did see that you are strong, correct?"

"Indeed, it has to be why."

"Soldier... like in the military? Not in the Salvation Army, I hope?"

"Now just what is that? As far as the impression that remains me, I had strict laws, I was performing a job that tolerated no mistakes, I had a mission... yes, a mission, and it was a duty and do-or-die and a charging assault, those are the words that dance before me, with the assistance of my allies being considered indispensable, and there were many dead among those involved with the mission, and still we had a place to be that was exalted and that we were passionate about and so we had to overcome even all that—"

"The Boy Scouts, then."

"No, that's definitely not it! I most certainly hope that that's not going to be it, most definitely!

Or so I would like to say but death may be a bad thing! It may be a problem!"

"Setting aside what was nothing but a joke, you are still going to assert that you are a human being, is that it?"

"Exactly. I lost my memories... but that's only a matter of recent events... I just came to my senses one moment and realized that I was walking the earth. I have made it this far by going by my sense of duty, which said I had to search for my companion, but... it seems I lost consciousness at some point. On that point I have been rescued by you people, and from there we reach to here."

"Strictly speaking you have no memories of being rescued, however, correct?"

"Of course I do! I owe you my life~."

She sidled up to me with moist eyes.

I pushed her back as I changed the target of the conversation.

"...it seems you spoke something about a source of electricity, earlier."

"Yes, my bus-type system cluster includes no program for eating. In its stead, an electrical-type subsystem remains, suggesting that this device is the type of human that operates on electric power."

"I do however think that that very strongly suggests that you are not human."

"Man does not live on bread alone, to quote."

"That goes so far beyond the tortured interpretation that it lands straight into the realm of legends, however."

"Humans are wonderful. I believe that being born a human is to be proud of."

I had this feeling like I should not be prodding overmuch into this. Her type is one that might become scary when pushed. Let us simply eject this from our consciousness, including also how the monolith stabbed into the charging dock had disappeared.

"But whatever else, I believe the monolith... transformed..."

"What are you talking about?"

"No, nothing, hoh hoh."

"?"

Setting aside whether she was human or not, simply put, what sort of person was she anyway?

"Pyon-san, was it?"

"...I believe..."

As a Mediator this was where I leave it as being a sickute (sick + cute) name.

"(But that is hardly what a human being is called so) may I call you P-ko? P-ko-san?"

"I d-, do not mind, but... why?"

"As gratitude. In order to live more easily, more or less, in these circumstances one makes free use of harmless nicknames, rushing on and past the society of men. Also, this is in consideration of the mental health of the the person who will later record this (that would be me) who might get a headache by writing 'Pyon-san', 'Pyon-san' over and over when compiling said record."

"Huh... no, m-, more importantly!" P-ko-san leaned forwards, "I understand that the both of us are currently engaged in some mission within this facility...?"

"I am not sure whether this is a mission or not, but we were on our way downwards, looking for an exit. We kept being attacked by creatures such as the ones before, seriously, we are about to run out of energy."

"Then will you add me to your squad?"

"You?"

"I do not happen to possess specialized search skills applicable to the interior of this construction, however I do believe I can be of use as an escort."

My, what an unexpected proposition.

"You seem quite reliable when it comes to escorting, indeed. Still, why? What are you going to do about the search for your comrade?"

"About that, I would have you go along with me."

Almond pupils tinged with a shine of seriousness.

"...in exchange for helping with your search, you will be our escort, that is our transaction, then."

"I would be happy if you thought it as a request from me. This is also thinking about how, for my part, I would like you to take care of energy supply should I suffer any further power failures."

If her batteries cut off while we were walking about it would be a serious problem, indeed.

"If you stuck your head into something like a charging dock, could you not recharge by yourself?"

"What is a charging dock?"

"Well, something like a pedestal that is used to charge up. That gelatinous creature, you see, had transformed. It had taken over a nearby plug. Also, those things clad in varicolored tints eat knives and the like."

"I apologize. I am unable to understand..."

It seems my lexicon could not quite explain their terror...

"So, well, what do you say?"

Considering we were unable to remove the threat of the creatures of our own strength, there was no need for a single thought, the conclusion was one.

"Very well. We will cooperate."

"Oooh! To come under a squad is exceptionally joyful for me!"

"S-, squad?"

We exchanged a firm handshake. My hand, grasped with the strength of a vise, was nearly crushed.

"OwChCh!"

"I-, I apologize deeply! My search was still incomplete... it seems that I cannot even connect to the 'net, and was unable to download an appropriate application. I must inform you that it will still take some time before I can adjust my control system on my own."

A declaration quite removed from a human's, that, hmmm.

"Our bodies are frail, so take safety under consideration, if I may ask. I am confident about my sense of entitlement, however."

"Yes ma'am, please leave this to me."

With the discussion now finished, I decided to call over Assistant-san and the fairy.

"...?" "You rang?"

Bringing the three closer, I introduced each party.

"So, this is Assistant-san, he helps me with the job. The tiny person riding on his shoulder is a fairy. You do not need explanations, right?"

"Hm-mh..." P-ko-san fixed her gaze straight onto the two. My ears picked up a pleasant 'ding' sound coming from nowhere in particular. "Assistant-san has been successfully recorded! The fairy... this person, where would they be located?"

"Hm? But he is right there..."

"I'm here!" The fairy did hop cheerfully, but...

"....." P-ko-san looked troubled. "My apologies for inquiring, squad leader. The results of my scans show no deviation from norm, and the existence of an individual that could be identified as a fairy has not been confirmed."

That was preposterous.

I had the fairy ride on my palm.

"Here, look, he is just on my palm, right? Can you see him?"

"...no, with all due respect... nothing at all."

She could not see fairies?

This was not the sort of mood in which she would utter jokes. Whatever the reason, she seemed seriously unable to acknowledge fairies.

"...oh dear oh dear."

It was not like fairies would show themselves before just any human.

Particularly when their number was low, the sole victors were the concepts of awe and fright, and they were not quite easily witnessed. That was why the average person had nothing but the memories of having frequently played with them when they were innocent children. They simply did not appear: this was in fact a frequent event, but not being able to recognize a fairy right before one's eyes made me think of nothing less than an extraordinarily poor affinity.

"Things like these are bound to happen, I suppose..."

"Not at all, it simply appears that my systems are of a fairly old type. On-land missions are still a realm I'm unskilled with, and it may well be thought that my analyses are perhaps inadequate. I conclude that it is due to these two reasons that acknowledging this 'fairy' is to me impossible!"

Her back extended, her legs spread, her right cheek still facing me, her posture froze.

"W-, what is that about?"

"You may strike me at any time, squad leader."

"I will not strike you, seriously!"

"What did you say?"

"Me, I wanted to see it, though!" Said the fairy enigmatically.

"Come now, come, forget that and see how the fairy is talking to you, do you see?"

"...I have not heard anything."

"Communication breakdown or something?"

Seems that this is going to be literally that, indeed.

"I will start up my self-diagnostic functions. I am made such that I am able to do that. With it, it is possible to further improve and optimize my functions, however time is necessary. Is there no problem if we resume our mission for the moment?"

"Should we? Well then, we shall depart. So, how should we be searching for your comrade?"

"The only thing I know is that they are concealed nearby."

Concealed, she said... this sooo seemed like an annoyance.

...I made a mistake, have I?

We left the room and came to a long and wide passage extending to the left and to the right. As imaginable, this was the very same passage running in every direction inside the city that people ordinarily used in the stead of roads. This was the long path that we four had to once again advance onto.

Party composition was as follows.

Leader... I.

Subleader... Assistant-san.

Squad member... P-ko-san.

Protective charm... the fairy.

I had the feeling we were not even fully organized for being a squad. However, the presence of P-ko-san, a reassuring ally, was more than enough, even taking away the dodgy nature of her assertion that she was a human.

"Water is first thing."

While walking, I decided to reaffirm the priority of our search.

"And so, mister fairy, if you could graciously find us some water, we would be very grateful."

"But it might be all blobby you know?"

It seemed that he could not distinguish between water and the gelatinous creatures.

"In that case, I will leave it to you, P-ko-san."

"Ma'am!, I do not really understand, but leave it all to me!"

"How long will your battery last, P-ko-san?"

"Without combat, about three hours. Should I need to perform intense changes in stance, it will drain in ten minutes, so I would like you to be careful about that, if possible."

Intense motions... in other words fighting and the like, I see.

That said, even if fighting did not occur, three hours were a disheartening amount of time left.

"..." Assistant-san's eyes flickered with the need to say something.

"Just in case, I did take the charging dock with us... so as long as we find an electric outlet, we should have no problem."

It was securely stuffed into a sack, tied it with rope, and dragged it across the ground. As it might go back to jellyform creature when touched, I devised these measures to avoid touching it.

"Will we last?"

I turned back to the voice of the fairy and...

"...you have increased, I see."

Having multiplied at some point, fairies of three colors, red blue and green, were standing by as if a single coordinated entity. I handed them the rope, and the trio combined their strengths and dragged the sack.

And still, their population had increased at last, I could say.

They gathered when things were fun... or rather, it was not unthinkable that they could be subdividing or multiplying or the like.

"This seems to have become fun in the fairy sense of things."

In the human sense of things, I reeeally wished it would not become a big uproar, though!

"So, after that, your comrade, P-ko-san."

"You will have my deepest gratitude if you could do anything on the matter."

"Lastly, an exit and... there, a staircase. We are going down!"

The party solemnly descended the narrow staircase. It had a width such that two people could just barely pass past each other. Perhaps an emergency passage, perhaps just something that could be called a lane. We went through a minuscule landing, turned around further, and descended the staircase. Downwards and downwards.

At the landing it was possible to move in other directions, however at present we were expecting water and an exit both, meaning we were going to go downwards.

"Still, P-ko-san, how shall we go about searching for your comrade?"

"I am supposing that they are in a much more crowded area. That would be located nearer the lower floors, in a place more isolated from the outside world."

"What kind of person is he?"

"A coward who has abandoned the mission. He is to be punished and apprehended."

Punished? Arrested?

"What, you mean you are chasing after him?"

"Yes ma'am."

This was an arrest...

We continued for a while, then found a shutter had been lowered on the staircase itself, making it a dead end.

"We should go back up and try another path."

"Please leave this to me."

P-ko-san inserted her fingers in the gap between the shutter and the floor and shoved upwards with her knees. Alongside the metallic clattering of the lock being broken, the shutter was all too easily prized open.

"Mnh, convenient."

"This has reduced my remaining battery life to one hundred and fifty minutes, however."

"We should find a room with an electric outlet and rest there."

At that point, being at a loss for electricity did not seem to be much of a problem anymore.

As we walked them, the passages and the staircases both were already enveloped by a warm, white light, we only saw dark areas here and there where the devices or maybe the wiring was faulty, making it evident that this whole area was electrically 'alive'.

Once we entered that residential area, we would be able to obtain as much electricity as we wanted, that was certain. We passed under the shutter and advanced forwards.

After advancing for a while, we found a large crack that had split the staircase.

"It appears that this was the reason why this area had been shuttered off."

The crack was wide enough that a child could fall into it.

"Squad leader, this crack was not created via direct impact."

"So it is a natural formation?"

"It isn't, it appears to have been caused by an intense load stress in the area around the crack. That's how it is split. This sort of destruction easily occurs when building materials are too rigid."

"In other words, when the whole building twisted *snap!* and it tore apart, I see."

"Yes ma'am. Buildings with flexibility are stronger. That said, a weight like this cannot be entirely supported by just the strength of the material. Multidimensional measures are required."

"Well, given how the places we have walked so far felt, the construction plan feels sloppy, to put it in one word."

"Did they not use variable materials when expanding, then? If they used liquid metal, with arbitrary shapes and properties, this would not be impossible."

"What is liquid metal?"

"Metal in a gelatinous state. Its flow is also controllable via electricity, therefore treatment and remolding are simple, and as long as there is at least a single human who can assemble a script, it can be reused for any sort of building and machinery and parts. Even without specialized knowledge, on the 'net there are stored an endless number of sample sources for a variety of machinery, all turned into databases, dramatically opening up a world of possibilities for even weekend carpenters, nay, weekend engineers, a basic technology that is the pride of humanity."

"D-, does it even fit under the category of human science, that?"

If it had been fairy science I would have understood, you know?

"Of course. The science us humans have is something like a blessed light."

What era that was I did not know, but humans from it were also quite persevering.

"Refactoring is possible via control programs even without external processing, and it ignores metal fatigue completely, so once assembled it can be utilized semi-permanently. Utilizing its intrinsic elevation and properties of motion, even things like high-rise buildings such as this can be fully constructed without any need for high-altitude workers."

"If it can be remolded, then how come this crack was not fixed and left us with a dead end?"

P-ko-san stared fixed at that crack that felt like a scarred wound.

"...I have heard that the structure of low-quality liquid metal hardens due to age-related wear.

Another possibility is that after the casting the structure whole has encryption applied to it in order to avoid casual destruction of the building, but that is reported to the country and subject to management. But if, for example, the foundations of the Country or the municipality were to become shaky, and the managed data be lost... it would be unfeasible to undo the encryption at an individual level."

The future society of the distant past was really complex.

The crack was massive, but the edge of the staircase had managed to avoid being torn apart. We passed that part carefully, crawling into the bottom of the earth.

Whatever supertechnology the city construction may have used, it was made by duplicated construction patterns, consequently there was no avoiding a lack of variety. The illumination always kept at a single specific brightness, one wall showed no change from the next, the old decorations had undergone chemical alteration and melted down, and all those sort of things interweaved into a harmonious, hollow scene. The mazelike construction invited sleep, and it was the fairies who called me awake from it.

"There!" "Might be!" "Water!"

The three pointed at a single door.

"Mh... we have to investigate."

Dazed, I shook my head to forcibly regain my wavering self-consciousness. Fatigue was accumulating.

"It does not appear to be a home."

At present, we were walking down a wide pathway.

This had to have been altogether too crowded in the past. As vestiges of being overflowing with things, there were loosely melted blackened wreckages stuck here and there on the floor. There were still many that retained their original shapes, and what attracted my eyes were a nearly disassembled bicycle and fragments of shattered glass.

There was a lot of glass because this was a shopping street, of course. I could tell from the many shops lining both sides. The majority had their shutters lowered, but among them there were those who kept their shop facade like they were still waiting for customers.

What the fairies pointed at was one of those.

"There are traces of violent acts having occurred."

"The glass is nearly completely broken, indeed."

There was only one sheet intact.

"Everybody, please wait here. I will go see!"

As the inside of the store was also filled with glass shards, we decided to entrust her with this.

"Be nice if there was water, however."

"..."

Assistant-san gave me a long nod. It was an assent that truly felt real, given by someone who had passed through a hard physical experience.

"MeaOW!"

With that arrhythmic war cry (?), P-ko-san shattered the last glass pane and rushed inside.

"There are enemies!"

So the presence of water was yet again one of those jellified creatures!

"Missed?" "Seems so!" "Sorries!"

The fairies... they truly had no fear of danger, did they.

These jellies had a red body color. Worse, they had protuberances that I saw as horns.

Compared to the green and black they were clearly of a higher level (were they?).

"Squad leader! You must evacuate!"

After a squabble in midair, the two thrust away from each other and landed. A glare-off, lasting some time. Afterwards, clash. The disadvantage from the difference in body sizes allowed the red gel and its outstanding flexibility to dodge, and conversely entangle with P-ko-san's ankle and make her flip over. Next came one of its specialties, the jump attack... P-ko-san was in danger!

"A piece of meow, that's what you are!"

Released from her toppled stance, she struck the red jelly with a pinwheel-like kick. The jelly slammed into the wall and adhered to it.

"Finishing blow!"

P-ko-san charged towards the wall. However, the red jelly was also hiding an ace up its sleeve. Those horns that seemed pointless clouded white, and the instant they did, they were fired off at high speeds.

Oh! Violence! Missile weapon!

"nWyah?!"

Direct hit on P-ko-san. The projectiles seem to act as go-between with the jelly, as the instant they struck they expanded to envelop her entirely. Worse, they had much more strength than visible to the eye, they seemingly counterbalanced kinetic energy and wiped away P-ko-san's momentum, making her collapse straight downwards.

"Awww, shot down!" "Flying rounds!" "This is what we call outstanding!" "Is that a monster?" "I might just want to catch it!" "It wants to be a shark trapper-meow!"

Did you multiply just for this moment, seriously.

"This was the biggest mistake I could have ever made!"

"P-ko-san, you do not seem to be doing well against it! Run away!"

"Ngggh... my mission... my mission!"

Is that something to be frustrated to the point of tears...

I rushed over to P-ko-san, who seemed to have no intention of running away, and tried to remove the receivers, but—

"There is some sort of powerful adhesive and they will not come off..."

My hands both laid on P-ko-san, and I also became unable to move any longer. The creature did not let that slip by, and with a timing so perfect it seemed to be accustomed to doing this, it drew an arc and came to attack us.

W-, will we be killed?! Both together?!

But right then!

"...!"

Assistant-san too came to embrace me at the hips.

T-, that did make me happy, but like this we will be caught all three in the same striike!

"Slime GET!"

A silly fairy caught the red jelly with a bug-catching net it pulled out from who knows where. Saved all too easily! (The mind for itself was exhausted.)

The fairies ganged up and pulled out the jelly from the net and toyed with it by jostling it about. With hands moving like those of cruel children. "Rare mon? Rare mon?" "Trade! Trade!" "It's red, it's so amazing!" "This from the new expansion?" "This might be to boast about!" "I wanna call it Huge Heracles Slime!" And as the struggling jelly became docile partway through, I saw someone stuck a teensy little ampoule-like thing into it, which strangely bothered me.

Then.

"Receivers removed!"

"Dear me, this is so pleasant on the skin."

When the fairies poured the neutralizing powder that they made (ingredients unknown), the receivers lost their adhesive power and ended up all floppy.

"J-, just what exactly has happened?"

"Well, the fairies have saved us... can you not see them?"

"...sorry..."

The fairies had captured a second jelly and were having fun with it in their way.

"In other words, this was settled peaceably."

"Ngggh, I am mortified. If only I could connect to the network I might be able to download a much more effective control script..."

"Would you power up if you downloaded that?"

"Yes ma'am! On the network, volunteers provide without recompense all-purpose combat behavior scripts for hobby dolls, they can be found anywhere! If I downloaded one of them..."

It was truly amazing how she still thought herself human at that point.

"Next time... next time I will have results!"

"W-, well, I shall look forwards to them."

Assistant-san tugged my sleeve.

"Yes, what is it this time?"

He had drawn a number of illustrations on his sketchbook. My eyes ran on hem and I found that it was all the creatures that we had randomly encountered, which made me emotionally flinch backwards³.

▮ Slime types



Green jelly "Green Slime"

Black jelly "Black Slime"

Red jelly "Huge Heracles Slime"

³ The text in the pictures matches the text in the description. Pictures are ordered right to left, then top to bottom.

Blue jelly "Huge Caucasian Slime"
Dark green jelly "Huge Neptune Slime"
▯ **Puppy type**



Dog robot "Hellhound"

▯ **Beast type**



Like a garbage truck? "Behemoth" ← second most powerful

From the stars



Dragon type ← most powerful?
Knight type ← might be your rival
Skeleton type

He repeatedly tapped the pen on the From the Stars category, expressing passionate enthusiasm, however I truly did not understand what made him overflow with that zeal.

"Being immature, are we."

"....."

Ah, he got depressed.

"You boys do like this sort of things, I see."

"..."

A sigh, and he headed back towards the fairies. It was a season of ennui.

The fairies were surrounding Assistant-san's sketchbook and making merry, a scene of boys all too happily playing together which gave me smiling feelings.

"Squad leader! I am redeeming my stigma! I have discovered something interesting!" And she flapped her arms wildly as she made that proposal to her superior.

"Something interesting?"

"Yes ma'am! Inside that store there was an electronic map for customers that's still operational!"

"A map? Did you say map?"

"Exactly so! The electronic map not only shows the construction of the city, but the present location and can calculate the shortest route to a destination, also it can propose and reserve the means of transportation to use in that occasion, furthermore, as long as the person has opened to the public their pro (profile) in the citizen registration settings, people can be searched in real time, a most amazing thing! Oooh, this is going to be a revolution in social stalking in the technological world, yes indeed indeed indeed!"

This person was being excessively frantic, was she not?

"You want to be told that you have done an outstanding job that badly, then..."

"Hurry up, hurry up, squad leader!"

Not listening are we, indeed we are not.

I was taken along.

"My!"

There were tables and chairs for customers, and furnishings that made it look like a log cabin. It appears to have been what was called a café. A wall was filled by a monitor for common use, and presently what was displayed there was a bird's eye view of the whole of the city. The image was realistic, and was so accurate it could be mistaken for a photograph.

"This is not just an image, is it?"

"No ma'am. These are computer graphics. Being that, they can be manipulated. To angles and sizes in which you can easily see things."

P-ko-san did something on the panel installed before the monitor. The entire city dynamically spun around and around.

"This is amazing..."

"This is an electronic map of high accuracy."

"Huh? ...except this city seems to have a different shape from what I saw from outside...?"

"The parts added afterwards changed the shape of the city, perhaps? It is thinkable that there were reasons why the data was not updated despite new blocks being added."

And like that, without even anything to spare to make effective use of the new blocks, the city grew deserted, to quote. Quite quickly, too.

"Can you show our present location with precision?"

"I don't believe that will be a problem."

The city became very very much enlarged, and the view passed through walls and went deeper and deeper and deeper... finally it arrived at the café we were in, and the exact same viewpoint overlapped.

"Wah, this is surprising, indeed!"

"Hahah!" P-ko-san was triumphant.

In the data, the inside of the café was not a mess.

The displayed CG was detailed, and it scrupulously replicated its appearance in days past.

The tables and the chairs were arranged with an eye to beauty, the glass was transparent and had no damage whatsoever, and the walls and floor were in the style of a log cabin.

"This looked like a warm and inviting café, indeed."

Though in the CG there were equally no people, the destruction itself I saw like it had lowered even the temperature.

Ignoring the sentimentality of that, P-ko-san continued talking.

"The closest exit is here."

In an instant the viewpoint whooshed backwards, but just as it was about to roll back to the overhead view of the city, it slowly thrust back into the city, closing in on a nearby point on ground level.

"This large iron gate is the exit."

There were a number of overhead wires laid in the center, making it possible to examine the footpath to the left and right.

That gate was so preposterously large that a fortress whole might have been able to pass through it.

"I am displaying the shortest route."

To make it more readable, the display switched from photorealistic to wireframe mode, with a red marker line between two points, the café and the gate. The marker line twisted and meandered like a snake, running through a complicated and sort of hard to understand route. I ran my finger on the map.

"We went through this passage before, right? The café is here, the path we have walked so

far is... well, thinking about this distance, the red route is making us walk quite a way, is it not."

"Also, this is data from when the city's functionalities were in good health. On the way, there could still be many many dead end passages like the one earlier."

"We cannot rely on it, then."

We ran the map's viewpoint all over, looking for a better route, but... it was not even expectable that there would be anything that convenient.

"P-ko-san, how about you smash the floor and make the shortest distance a possibility?"

"T-, that is impossible!"

"Hmph!"

I glared at her for a moment, but then gave up.

"Enough. Now then, let me see... is it possible to save this map?"

"For that I will record it. I do not happen to possess data on the city, so I will be saving just the image..."

And there the cat tail that jutted out from deep within her clothes promptly pushed its tip open and bared a terminal, which flawlessly inserted itself into a socket below the monitor.

"Recording has been completed! ...uhm, is there something?"

"...you are a robot, are you?"

"I a-, am a human!"

"That there just now was... incredibly robot-like, you see."

"Why do you have to belittle me so! Human rights! I want human rights!"

No, at this point that was quite irrelevant, and, well, I also say that for myself.

"More importantly, while we are here, how about looking up the person you are searching for?"

"No... it is certain I will not find him..."

P-ko-san made a pained smile.

"Is he not that sort of person?"

"Well, he is as far as functionality. It is just that the only people that can be searched from this map are registered citizens. The person I am searching for has no relation nor affinity with this city, and so."

"Mh-hm... say, P-ko-san, if we found some survivor using this it would feel like woohoo, could you please try that?"

"Understood. I will set the search objective to all the citizens, and not set anything under the headings of age and sex. This will make the near totality of the city its scope, so... next I only have to click this Stalking Key, and there."

[SEARCHING...]

That word appeared on the screen for just an instant.
And the next instant,

[SEARCH RESULTS: 1 FOUND]

My eyes and P-ko-san's nearly turned into the size of particles.

"How are there anyYYY!!!"

Is that supposed to be the last survivor or something?

"I-, its location, where is it?"

"They are close. They are very close. They are close, I say, but they also seems to be approaching at a terrifying speed..."

The blue point of light on the screen was madly dashing.

As she had searched the whole territory, the map of the city being displayed was nearly a bird's eye view. Within it, a blue shine was cutting through with a quite the force.

"In the image they are tiny motions, however... considering the reduced scale of the map, this thing, it has quite the speed, does it not?"

"Yes ma'am. It is outputting around one hundred kilometers per hour. For an overland machine, that would seem to be a fairly high speed."

"Why are they headed this way?"

"I expect they have determined which terminal we have searched from."

"Mh-hm" I understood the meaning of her words, but it was hard to get a tangible sense of them. "In other words, can I say that we have been traced?"

"Yes ma'am, that is exactly what it is."

"...by the way, could you do the same thing, perhaps?"

"Indeed, as long as I had time, I could physically access the city's local network and do it."

"About how long will it take?"

"Access from within the system is nothing complicated. As long as I had a week, I will be able to connect to the main system."

"But you need power to perform that operation, right?"

"Correct, that is of course."

"Hummm..."

"What is it, ma'am?"

"I have no definite proof, however it is possible that the systems of this city—"

Right at that moment, the whole of the café emitted a creaking, grating noise.

"...what was..."

"...that sound?"

A crack formed on the whole of a wall, seeing it we jolted backwards, and immediately after we did, a destructive, thunderous roar more intense than the falling of a large tree blew in from the other side of the crevice.

It was obvious that some sort of enormous thing was pushing through from the other side.

The invader's 'horsepower' only allowed the wall a few blinks of the eyes of struggle. The wall's surface was very easily eaten through, and a brownish clump was pushed into the café.

"Knockdown!"

P-ko-san shouted, then delivered what could be called a reckless flying kick to the nose of the massive thing. There was no way it would have worked. That was what I thought. As predicted, she made an odd scream like "*f'gin!*" and was struck back (it was sort like a ping-pong rally), bouncing on the floor and rolling outside the café.

I also inferred I was in danger, and, first things first, I escaped outside of the café.

"P-ko-san!"

"Ngh-, ngggh..."

As I was supporting her as she stood with a stagger, the creature calmly showed itself from within the café that had been filled with a fog of dust,

"T-, that is heavy machinery, no?"

It was a massive thing in a faint beige that reminded of a highly detailed hill of dust. The front side of its angular, powerful frame was equipped with wall-like dozer blades. The blades as a device allowed for literally sandwiching things between them, so should need arise it could

either destroy or carry away any sort of obstacle. There was no difference between the thing and heavy-duty construction equipment.

"Mh-mh, that is nearly a weapon, indeed!"

P-ko-san had spinny eyes as she took a stance in order to try to fulfill her mission.

"Does it look like you can beat it?"

"....."

She fell silent!

"Heh heh... hahahah!"

We heard a victorious laugh coming from the speakers on the bulldozer.

"Identify yourself!"

"How really awkward of you..... uhmmm, your name was, right... Pi-, Pi-... Pyone?"

"That is incorrect!"

"Right, she is P-ko-san."

"T-, that is also not correct, however..."

"Woah, names and that stuff don't matter at all! There!"

Someone showed up from the interior of the bulldozer.

He was a young male. He had an odd attire much like P-ko-san's, and had a nearly identical flowing scarf wound on his neck. As before I could not quite explain this, but it felt like a costume a child would like. Right, they were not clothes. They were a costume. That was the word that suited it best.

No mistake, he was the same kind as P-ko-san. Same kind... as a girl that had superhuman strength, used inexplicable powers, lived on a diet of electricity, and despite all that asserted she was a mere homo sapiens.

A feeling like this was not going to end well was slithering and slathering and lathering.

"You are...! Uhm... o-, o-... Oyage?"

"Who is that, you are WRONG!"

"I am also not called anything like 'Pyone' or the likes!"

"Then what!"

"Ngh... due to circumstances, at present you may call me P-ko! Now you yourself, state your name!"

"I... I'm... I'm not bothered by things such as names! If you are P-ko, then I shall give my name as O-taro!"

"Are you trying to ridicule me!"

"That is what I am going to do now! Right... I'll say this. I have no name to give to the likes of you!"

"Y-, you uncouth...!"

The conversation was not going anywhere.

"O-taro or whomever you are, I have one thing I would like to ask you! Why did you just up and renounce your mission and leave the war front!"

P-ko-san pointed a stabbing finger at O-taro, who was standing on the vehicle.

"Silence! You know nothing of my suffering! If you want to know it then I will tell you, so listen to the lament of a deeply wounded soul! I have, right, I! ...uhm... ahhh, in other words... for some reason. ...right, for some reason... I stopped liking the mission?"

"P-ko-san, P-ko-san, it seems he is damaged as well."

O-taro-san stomped his foot to object.

"You there, tall woman! Are discriminatory words like 'damaged' anything you should utter! I am human!"

"Him as well..."

Also, 'tall woman' was utterly discriminatory and all that.

"You must tell me about this in more detail!"

"All else aside, I just stopped liking it! I don't remember the details, but I stopped liking it! You yourself, are you good with that! Are you good with being made to participate to that mission?"

"Me, I... that mission was... at present I sort of forgot, but disliking it, never... duty is duty!"

"Then why have you come here! You could've just fulfilled that duty on your own! I don't want to do it anymore! I will stay here... hiding in this city with all these toys, living in quiet, having fun! I will live doing nothing except what's fun!"

I could not ignore those words. I took one step forwards to speak.

"S-, squad leader? That guy, please tell what is what to that guy, all right!"

"Of course, O-taro-san or whomever you are, your assertion—"

"W-, what about it!"

"Truth is, I agree."

"GyahMeow?!"

P-ko-san's jaw nearly dislodged.

"But, see!" I of course added something to that. "That sorta life is good in the beginning, but then you start feeling more and more trapped, and in the end you begin to have things like a persecution complex, and that would be a problem in many ways, you see?"

"What did you say...! B-, but things are so much fun now?"

"Exactly, it is fun only in the beginning, but your mind will be set on edge quite quickly. It will become hard to breathe and you might suddenly want to shout out loud, or maybe you occasionally start wanting to go outside, but the eyes of society scare you and you might only be able to go outside at night... these are all nasty things, right?"

"Ngggh, t-, that there'd be bad... my mind's gonna get sick, dammit..."

"Therefore, stop these silly acts and return to your job. You will find that your mood improves quite a bit just by doing your job!"

O-taro-san pinned down his lips with an uneasy face, but once hearing the word 'job' he once again showed his seething anger.

"I don't want to... whatever else, I don't want that!"

Matching the heightening of his emotions, the bulldozer emitted the loud sound of its motors operating.

"I at the very least don't want to return to the mission! P-ko, if you have come here to take me back... I will do nothing but resist! With the most powerful among killdozers, Behemoth, customized by the very greatness that I am!"

"....."

Behemoth. This word made Assistant-san, who was watching at a distance, show a reaction. He came running over in a hurry, showing me his sketchbook.

"...how nice, it actually did exist..."

".....!"

He seemed satisfied.

For her own, P-ko-san made a stern face and did not back down.

"Killdozer Behemoth, you call it!"

"Exactly! From maker Shoumatsu⁴, this 'dozer incorporates a great number of revolutionary

4 A play on Komatsu, one of the major bulldozer makers.

new technologies, yes, it is the most cutting edge four wheel drive pro series machine on sale! I have first of all carefully armored the weakest areas, and together with implementing that peerless protectiveness, I strove for lightening by removing the excess parts of its interior! Furthermore, as nose blades I chose the Dragon Mark 5s, which have proven to be effective even for landmine disposal! To make this move I needed to replace the whole of the transmission, it was truly hard work, know that! But I couldn't be lax with what drives the whole thing! I installed a superstellar motor and ultra-high speed gears, added ball bearings to the counter gear, and improved the original wheeled drive by replacing them with crawlers (caterpillar tracks) of my own make! As for convergent gear control CPU, the Weissman Head, with its reputation for stability, was a natural choice indeed! Of course I didn't forget, not at all, and starting with the drive shaft I used the electromagnetic liquid metal Materielle Σ (Sigma) 270 for all important parts, but... heh heh, where exactly I used it is a trade secret! I will only say that regulations were respected!"

"....." "....."

Every one of us to the last found that explanation beyond our ability to follow.

"There was technical jargon flying about everywhere, and things are something-something."

"R-, regardless, that Behemoth is a powerful enemy, is that correct~?"

"It's no mere powerful enemy! It's the most powerful... no, the most ferocious! Did you know? That ninety percent of bulldozers are garbage? This is the Crazy Machine of the remaining ten percent!"

Going all out, are we~.

"Why youuu!" P-ko-san bared her will to fight at last. "Then I will continue until that Behemoth or whatever can no longer be refunded... no, until there is not a single part untouched, I will destroy it--"

Without any warning, P-ko-san vanished.

In her stead, a monolith tumbled down.

"...o-, out of batteries?"

That was what it looked like, but the monolith right away grew four limbs in rapid succession, lifted its trunk up with the legs it had generated, and as it did it once again returned to the shape of a person.

"Whupsy daisy..."

She balanced herself by spreading her arms, her scarf loosely grew as the last thing, and her transformation was complete.

"I happen to have witnessed something interesting."

I am going to boast so hard to Grandfather. If I live to return.

"T-, that was very close! I had nearly lost my consciousness!"

"Hah hah hah! Looks to me like your batteries are almost out, right, P-ko!"

"Grrrr!"

The P badge on her chest switched on and off in long slow blinks.

"...squad leader, I shall be taking over this. In that while, please, escape to safety."

"Will you be all right? There is also the choice of running away together, however."

"Stance control process linking vibration dampeners at priority eight, switching unnecessary sensors to suspend mode, ceasing operations of thermal shield, calculating kicking motors utilization frequency limit and most efficient attack trajectory!"

Her utterly tense, serious expression then slackened and,

"...I am all right. I have disabled heat isolation, so although I will no longer be able to move once I reinstate it, I believe I can withstand it for a brief battle."

"What are you doing!"

"After smacking down that piece of meow I will come to cease my functions. I would like you to recover me afterwards."

I groaned out loud. Recovery, recovery... but how would I do that?

"Please go, squad leader."

"Understood... you are doing this so that we can leave this place..."

"Now then, I would like to exchange communicator numbers, if I may request."

"Sure..."

We recorded each other's numbers.

"Looks like you are done saying your goodbyes, P-ko!"

"This was not a goodbye. This was a promise that we will meet again."

"Heh, and now, for the sake of Justice... DIE!"

"Justice is on MY side!"

Simultaneously with that usual 'ding' sound, P-ko-san lowered herself and kicked off the ground. The blades of the Behemoth also started moving. Without hesitation the petite body charged in. She slipped through the blades' pressure attack by the breadth of a sheet of paper, charging through towards the core.

"WHAT?!"

"...you piece of MEOW!"

A preposterous energy sprayed out intensely from the bottom of her shoes for just an instant. It was jet fuel, or maybe plasma... she might be using some kind of propellant. The Behemoth's enormous body was lifted up like it was doing a wheelie, and the caterpillar tracks, which moved a moment later, scratched void. At that moment, P-ko-san did like a person doing weight lifting would and held the vehicle in place. The bulldozer could not output power in order to advance, and like that was pushed backwards.

"Ngh! Get off, P-ko!"

"I will very much not."

She pushed it back into the entrance it had made, and the floor, not withstanding another bout of violence, gave in, and the three fell down to the floor below as one large clump.

"Aaaah! P-ko-saaan!"

The instant I entered inside the café (though it was nearly completely eaten through), the rest of the floor gave way.

"FweWah?!"

I was falling, it appeared. Quite proper.

A bizarrely deep darkness opened its mouth below the floor. It was a height from which I could not quite be saved should I actually fall down it. My thoughts stopped and I did not even scream. Thus unable to take in reality, I could only be aware of how my body was unhurriedly being dragged downwards.

"...!"

As I was falling, Assistant-san clung to my waist. A-, again with the same pattern?

But I wondered, maybe this way we will not come to fall together? The thing was so intense that even my sense of danger just flittered away.

"T'yah!"

The green fairy jumped at Assistant-san's ankle. The red fairy at the green fairy's feet. The blue fairy at the red fairy's feet. The black fairy at the blue fairy's feet... green yellow red blue black white green white red—

The chain of fairies, who had multiplied again at some point, was surprisingly robust.



While we experienced a bungee jump, the vector of our direction was not straight downwards but to the side, we were being blown nearly horizontally. Now we might just hit a wall and die, but soon as the fear of that end showed itself within my head, my consciousness itself luckily cut out.

"...good grief."

It seemed that many hours had passed by the time I regained my consciousness. It appeared I had been once again cast into an area with no functioning electricity, as all around me was filled with complete darkness and silence.

"Is there anybody?"

There was no reply. Both the childish roll-call and that radiator of body temperature that made me relieved every time he tugged my sleeves seemed to be at present deferred. With not even P-ko-san's futile efforts... well, O-taro-san or O-jiro-san or whomever not being there I would submit as a happy thing.

Regardless, it was dark.

Mere blackness did not make for The Dark, The Dark began when it was capable of melting away noises and voices. One could shout, but their voice was dampened away immediately, absorbed in its entirety. What melted away next was sanity. If one lost sight of their self when daunted by fear, at some point one would come to feel that the confines of their body also came undone, disassembled into parts of the darkness.

...it was going to be all right, I believed I was used to things like these.

I told that to myself, and vigorously.

Though I was in The Dark, my senses of smelling and hearing should still be reliable. Touch, too. If I remained proactive, I could make new discoveries.

"Now what is this, this scent reminds me of something...?"

It was different from the sour scent of ruins sealed for many a year, however, concretely speaking, I could not come up with a name for it. It was different from that stifling sweetness of vanilla essence and from the pungent aroma of wine. As an example, it resembled that sensation that softly caressed the tip of the nose when I bit into a fresh strawberry.

I thought for a while, and recalled that it was the presence of vegetation.

"Are there plants, I wonder? But why they would be inside a sealed building..."

All I could think of was... extremely advanced houseplants or something? Nonsense!

As I sunk into thoughts my sense of smell adapted to the new environment, and I could no longer detect anything in particular that felt off. Right, overgrown houseplants and the like were irrelevant. I could not even eat them.

Thinking about the fear of bumping into things, I could not move at high speeds. I could only make my hands wander about in front, ensuring that everything was safe as I advanced.

"Found a wall."

Laying my hands on the hard wall I could feel a little relief.

"Right, right. I... am not injured, am I?"

I had slacked on examining my own body.

My forehead hurt just a little bit, but I had no pain whatsoever in either legs or arms. It appeared that the bungeeing by the fairies had absorbed the near totality of the impact. And, adding several other lucky things, there it was, how I had reached this situation.

If, say, Assistant-san were to be nearby, it would not be strange, however...

"Assistant-saaan, are you theeere!"

Audible silence. No moaning, no footsteps rushing over.

Possibility: he was in a situation wherein he could not move of his own strength, and also not shout?

His limbs were twisted, his cervical vertebrae shattered, and the blood from being knocked down from a high place—

I shook my head and at least managed to chase away that sort of thoughts. I wanted to make sure, but there remained no answer. If that were what happened, then I would not balk at relying without restraint on the miracles of the fairies. After all, people were no longer... I believed I should act warmly towards myself. At least in using some trick to survive what properly speaking I should have died from.

"Haaah... hah."

Though I was not running, my heart was pounding altogether too excessively. Awww, how cowardly was my flesh and blood body when imagining things like those. Splatter ostracized. Hate it.

...let us think later about joining up with the rest of the staff.

I forcefully archived everything on a shelf of my heart, a wide and sturdy shelf.

"Ah, the bags..."

This fact fell under the category of being fairly harsh, however I had no other choice but to accept it.

I had lost nearly all of my bags. That came because the bags that were shouldering had all been gathered together outside of the café. There had been no time to wear them back.

I had lost my canteen and all of my food.

Unease solidified and fell to the bottom of my stomach. I might as well say I had only avoided instantaneous death, I was now being embraced by a slower death.

"Can I go back up to where I was...?"

Thinking about it, I believed that the bungeeing had carried me to the layer below.

I tried thinking back to the electronic map. The shopping district passage where the café was located should have been fairly low in the city. Now then, what laid below that?

My memories said that there was a sparse residential area spanning several more layers.

Perhaps because the residential area had a lower ceiling in comparison to the shopping district, it was overlapped back and forth like the crust of a croissant. I pushed into a cramped place. This here was the simplest and most reliable way of dealing with population problems. Though it may be said that they made full use of special construction means, aging seemed to be unavoidable, so even the feeling when biting was as crisp and crunchy as a croissant's, indeed. Being bored through all at once by the falling Behemoth invited this brand new development.

The vertical hole pierced through the residential layer, and at last we arrived to the crux of the problem: the bottom layer.

Reference the electronic map. Now then well then, what was at the bottom layer?

"...there was a cavern."

A dead space completely covered in black even in the CG, reaching up to ten percent of the city's volume in size.

A pumpkin cut in half with its seeds removed laid on the desk upside down: that was how the city looked like externally. The problematic large, hollow cave was precisely the area that used to have the seeds. In the large cavity, in the stead of seeds, were an abundance of mysteries.

As the result of pathological compacting, the city had turned into a single giant structure, so just what was the reason for allowing this pointless open space to be enshrined within?

Why did they never head outside, choosing a life of eternal indoors?

Seeing the list of question being so smoothly updated put me in a mood close to desperation.

I could only watch with resignation the list being mercilessly printed on a roll of paper.

There was nothing better than a mystery solved, however, unlike those common mad and reckless scholars, I was in no mind to mistake my priorities. I was not going to say that a mystery was more important than my life.

I also did not know the reason why electricity did not reach this place.

Mere broken wiring, perhaps, or maybe they did not believe there was any need for it at all...

"I have got to move."

One certainly had to grope about in the darkness, however stopping my feet was a bad thing.

The fatigue accumulated to its peak and the shock from having been thrown flying from a high place made me want to sleep so hard I might as well just faint. There was a little bit of thirst, but physically I felt extremely well. I shall move for as long as I can move. I followed the wall and began traveling.

The dark was deep, the empty space cruel.

Well, the dark and the empty spaces were indifferent to living creatures to begin with, I have to say. Like outer space.

As had been lowered into this via a bungee jump stunt, it was unfeasible to return to the corridor I was in. To determine present location and look up a route to the destination, the power of an information network was indispensable. And at present I also did not have the skill of transforming wisdom into real-world strength like Grandfather had.

Right now I could only keep walking. To continue walking without letting the sense of time go required the same prudence as not spilling water from a spoon filled to the very brim with it. However, said prudence was also useful for keeping sanity close to myself.

An hour passed by in a blink of the eyes, adding one tick to the fatigue meter within the body. Still, just one. Still fine. Still alive.

The information coming in from outside were scarce, all I could feel was the stiffness of the building material reaching me from my fingertips at the wall as I walked. Soon my fingertips seized onto a different texture. There was a sensation of cold metal on the hands.

"A door."

Whether the phrase that rolled on my tongue had the dryness of hope or the bitter taste of reality was hard for me to judge. It was a change, that was no mistake. I for the time being decided to give a warm welcome to the discovery.

I opened the door with my hands and without hesitation had a go at this brand new world. On the other side also laid the dark, with no possibility of telling anything apart, but—

".....?"

I was hesitant about how to express the tiny change. It was something I felt the instant I passed through the door. To understand what it was required only the time needed for a stirred water surface to return to stillness.

There seemed to be a faint light here.

It was not like there was an easily visible light source installed in there. That said, photons were invading from somewhere, and I could see a faint shade where I was looking at. There was no light at my feet, either, which was not conducive to walking freely, but it had a tremendous effect on the mind.

Next was the smell. That musty stench of artificiality had decreased and the air became fresher. An air conditioning device had to be operating somewhere.

Last thing was the size. I was no longer detecting that confining pressure that bathed my skin from every direction. In short, this place was really big!

"I have stepped into that cavern, that is what this means."

I took my distance from the wall and stepped into open space.

I walked, relying on a faint shade, and suddenly I tripped on a tiny step. It was a staircase.

"This thing here, it is a stone staircase."

I touched it with my hands and I could tell it was a chilly stony material.

A large space. The bottom layer. Stonework.

My back shuddered and I nearly shouted out words with no meaning. The intellectual curiosity that instantaneously swelled inside my heart nearly disturbed my presence of mind.

"Wait, wait... haste and all that."

I still did not understand. I still had not made sure. And so – I thought that I would proceed.

I was advancing without a destination down what was not a one-dimensional passage, but a two-dimensional space that knew no mercy for wanderers.

My eyes had by and large grown accustomed to this faint light, and I had no hindrance to moving through the void even without clinging to a wall with my hand.

I climbed several stony steps, cut across what seemed to be a square, and advanced parallel to a stone wall when I noticed that I was standing before a massive building.

A building inside a city. It really gave me the feeling of a matrioska.

It was a well-settled building made of stone. It did not seem like a mere multi-story building, I could perfectly perceive how it was magnificent and solemn even across the darkness.

Should I go in, should I go back, I hesitated.

If I were calmer I would have entered without hesitation, however I had no intention of paying for my intellectual curiosity with my life. My throat was also going to be dry soon, and I also felt my stomach empty. Water and food. The safety of friends. Those were the important things at the moment. There were no things unconditionally gainable just by pulling back, however.

At that moment, I saw something white cutting across my sights.

I nearly reflexively followed after that.

There were four possibilities. It could have been Assistant-san, O-whatever-san, P-ko-san, or someone else. That was all. Thinking about the possibilities, I had over fifty percent chance of a safe encounter. There was no reason not to follow, in other words. Still, I decided I was not going to pointlessly call out to them but to first approach to a distance from which I could recognize who they were.

I followed the white figure, making sure to not make any sound of footsteps, but also speedily. It weaved through between buildings that looked like storehouses in the slightly inclining square.

From somewhere in the distance I heard the sound of water.

It came to be a long chase.

We passed through that place that seemed to be a square, and right now I had entered inside a building.

A chase in the vague darkness was not the hardship I thought it would be, it was the monotonous work of carefully following the echoing footsteps of my target. Both the white figure and I put our hands on the walls, literally fumbling about in the dark. As I became accustomed to walking in the darkness, I came to realize something like the trick to understanding this structure. This was a castle, or at least a building that fit into that category.

The scale was extraordinary and the age of construction also uncommon, and as I walked I could feel the slow but steady accumulation of the weight of both ceiling and history on my shoulders.

The white figure seemed to be walking at random. And so I came to be stuck with matching this erratic search, going back and forth in a complicated path without directional restraint, entering and exiting a room that appeared to be an archive, a creepy room furnished with a number of silhouettes, a gloomy and practical jail, and the like.

What sustained me in this chaotic search was the sound of water.

It was the muttering of a small river. Something that should never be found in a sealed city. Assuming it was not an auditory hallucination, continuing this search would signify steadily getting closer to that source of water.

"Water..."

As far as priorities, that was in the top spot. Next was the safety of the rest of the people. And then food. Lastly, an exit. Now just where did my life fit into all that?

Thinking about it was a pain in the posterior, so I decided to postpone that.

The sound of footsteps, which had come to pause, moved again. I went after it. Truth was that I had a vague guess about his identity, but if only I could be a little more certain—

"Where'd she gooo~~~!"

A bulky diving suit was standing right behind me with its headlight at full power.

"Eek!"

"Where did P-ko-san gooo!"

"What? Are you... perhaps O-jiro-san?"

"That was O-taro, right? No, that don't matter anymore. Where'd she go! She broke up the four-wheel drive bulldozer that I'd spiced up so well! That's jus' mean! I'm gonna tell the professor in charge this afternoon homeroom, get me!"

A professor being in charge of homeroom reminded me of The School, indeed.

"Why are you wearing that thing?"

"My Killdozer got broken and I only recovered me Materielle Σ (Sigma) 270, dammit, so I added EM wave blocking capabilities, mixed the paté, and built this... it's something like an UV protection thing."

Again with the blocking off of EM waves.

"Uhm, I would have one thing I would like to ask, if I may."

"What, just tell me where P-ko is and that'll be all, isn't it?"

O-whatever-san had a massive drill on his right hand, equipped for a rematch.

"Well, how come this city has anti-UV proofing to the point of being sealed?"

Being that he entered the city before us and interacted with all sorts of electronic devices, O-whatever-san should have known, I believed.

"I don't really get it, but ain't that a meteorite problem? Stuff like that remains in the records. There were too many so they intercepted them with nukes or something. They had to do that at a point further away from Earth, but I'm guessin' they failed. Something like they couldn't deal with the fragments fast enough so they intercepted them at the edge of the atmosphere. Using nukes in that point released a violent EMP (Electro-Magnetic Pulse), is what. That EMP was really nasty. I also got a bow shock, it was that nasty... nearly puked, I did."

"That is strange. I do not know how much damage that one of these EMPs could do, but in order to alter the city to this point they had to have had a long-term effect, correct?"

"And they did, right? They kept intermittently intercepting with nukes and all. The EMPs continued and electronic devices went poof, lock stock and barrel. The Great Discontinuity it's

called, it was this, right?"

"So that was how the Great Discontinuity happened, I see..."

This might have been quite the important news.

"Had to be a real mess up on ground. But after that they revived cities like this, that was some good job of them, wasn't it? We're also human beings. Dammit, I can't get inside this thing, why?"

He pushed his drill in as he swore.

"The attachment part still has its cover installed."

"Seriously? There, removed, this's the most powerful of 'em all. Most powerful in the history of most powerful, mebbe, Real Powerful."

"EM waves, then..."

I wondered, was there any connection with how the fairies dislike EM waves?

Before that, the microwave power grid for solar power generation covered the entire Earth, so if the fairies still existed, by what way... I see.

"Huh? Say, but what happened to solar power generation after that Great Discontinuity?"

"It got interrupted, what else do you think happened. Seems they did replicate some part of it via electromagnetic fluid metal, though. That's why there was a Super Great Silence right around when the hustle 'bout meteorites settled down, right? On an Earth-scale."

"Mh-hm, mh-hm, mh-hm!"

"What's that for, it's creepy."

"It is because I have reached an understanding about many a thing."

"Like what."

"It was traumatic for them and so they sequestered themselves inside. Like you are doing right now."

The dome-shaped faceplate installed on the diving suit shifted vigorously back and forth between the normal color (blue) and the attack color (red).

"...it a problem? Ain't got nothin' to do with it, don't it!"

"Nothing to do with it, this does not. And at present, P-ko-san is a friend of ours."

"That girl came to take me back! And I'm gonna defend myself from that, ain't that obvious!"

"What do you dislike so much about that anyway?"

"I forgot! I can't remember! Don't got anything but the memories that say that I don't wanna.

Right now, microwaves are whizzing down an' piercing in 'round here, right? Just getting touched by that stuff gives me a full stomach, but jus' when it's detected, automatic repair will proceed on its own 'cause of a bug in the electrical reception specs, understand. I made it so that I can't get power without actually using a charging dock, you see?"

"? ...but being repaired is a good thing?"

"I'd just gotten to a point where I could do what I liked by paralyzing my self-diagnosis using a special exception, if I normalized I would be unable to respond to my emotional prompts, everything including my sense of duty would awaken, and I'll end up just like her!"

In other words, this silly little brat would normally have a much more serious personality, was that how it was?

"What was the special exception?"

"What you've notified me of many times these last decades, you know what it is."

"I do not know."

"And there she goes! The signal to offer the remaining electronic data on an Earth scale, you see. Even provided a sample. I heard that, see, and I used it as an excuse to return. Knew it was no good to make a strict determination, though. That ain't a joke here... I just didn't wanna,

didn't wanna... whatever else, at least, I didn't want that... why is that, why? Well, whatever. Regardless, I don't wanna. Records loss banzai, me banzai, P-ko can cry!"

"Right, it was the People Monument Project..."

I could shorten the list of mysteries at last!

"Whichever the way, the girl's broke my four wheel drive, ain't forgiving her! I'll defeat her for Justice!"

"That is not a declaration that can fit under Justice."

"Shut it! She's gonna take a beatin'! Ain't gonna go easy on 'er just 'cause she's a woman!"

A sheet falling from above covered the top of the excited diving suit. Within the darkness, cut off from the headlight, somebody slowly held my hand from behind. It was a tiny, whitish figure.

"...what?"

I was gently being taken somewhere.

"What? What?"

I was growing further and further away from O-whatever-san... and soon enough, at a distant space, the white figure nimbly took out what it was holding in the other hand.

I thought that I heard the sound of some primitive device activating somewhere, but right afterwards, a massive stone fell on the top of the diving suit. The massive stone, cut rectangular from building materials, snapped in half, and with a little delay, even that monster-like diving suit collapsed backwards. Fainted.

"That looks painful..."

Without paying a single mind to the victims numbering one machine, the white figure pulled me.

"Dear me, sure, sure, I understand, truly. I will be coming now."

Wrapping my hand to the point of crumpling it, it had a delicate, however high, body temperature.

It had to have been around twenty minutes. Of us two walking the world of darkness, that was.

Suddenly I noticed something preposterous.

"I can see."

"...?"

The one pulling me did not turn their head, they simply targeted a wave of doubt at me.

"Did you not notice? Little by little, but still... I can see what is all around me."

"....."

It was getting brighter.

There was no illumination nearby, either, so light was filtering in from somewhere.

"It is possible that electricity is beginning to partially return."

Say, for example, that what we were walking in was a mossy-covered stone maze. A primitive, massive, stone-crafted building that time had turned into a black that melded with the night. It was far from having the air of the castle of a feudal lord or a Western-style building, to say it, but it had the imposing security of a fortress where soldiers assembled. A classical ambiance, lacking in anything overly elaborate, such that if I were told this was build many thousands years ago, I would have no credibility were I to doubt it.

"But it was pitch black until a while ago, that is a mystery, indeed."

"..."

We stepped over a door that had fallen down from rot, passed through a hall without pausing,

passed through gloomy arranged stones as in a garden, and at last we arrived at a wall that was emitting faint light. I thought it had a wall-scale light, but the truth was different. The white figure extended their fingertips towards the wall and the faint light it had. Touching history, manifesting reverence for the changing of forms, slowly. As soon as it was touched, the wall turned into sand and collapsed, and the intensely shining light, with nothing to block it anymore, pounded onto me from the other side. Why, it was like a curtain.

"Ngh—!"

I covered my eyes, enduring this harsh baptism for a moment.

The light hurt.

After that truly awkward time of several minutes that my pupils took to adjust, I went past the mountain of sand that used to be a cloth curtain.

"It is all right now, Assistant-san. Thank you for everything."

Our fingers unbound, something slipped away from my palm like a small fish would. I poured a gaze of gratitude on that finely detailed profile, and he quickly resumed his proper position of diagonally behind me.

".....amazing."

The place we had exited to was a sturdy stronghold standing on a high place. Specifically, on a terrace jutting out from it.

A whole castle, of all things, fit untouched within the city structure. That said, what was surprising was something else.

It was how it included a city.

From this terrace on the top of the castle I had an uninterrupted view of the cityscape surrounding the fortress.

"They built a city to cover another city entirely, amazing... I cannot believe it."

A grandiose plan, implemented via labor and technology.

They covered something old, something that they wanted preserved, with a shell and lived in it.

The shell layers went overlapping, and even when the original shape was completely covered, the overlapping still continued.

People enveloped something precious and left it there, continuing to live in the shell like nothing was the matter... eventually the thing became merely something that had been there since they were born, and—

"This is a cultural heritage site... this whole city is."

The people of the distant past were amazing. Like they preserved ancient plates and decorations, they left behind a whole city as a natural park, it was hard to believe. But at the same time, it was also a little bit sad. They used all their energy to preserve a city, while they forced themselves to live in cramped areas, also hard to believe.

Fearing the incoming tempest of EM waves, they were also unable to bathe directly in the light of the sun—

The sun.

I lifted my gaze upwards in order to learn the real source of this light, and on what I assumed would be a very thick ceiling I found the blue sky cut off in the shape of a disc. With my reserves of surprise fully exhausted, I could only be taken aback by it at that point.

A massive hole had been opened right on top of the city, one with an apparent diameter of several hundred meters!

"D-, did it fall down, this thing here?"

I lowered my gaze and noted that fallen building materials had been pushed to one corner of the city.

Fall down it did.

Perhaps the building could not stand its own weight, perhaps the building materials had degraded. Whatever happened, the ceiling had collapsed and it had not been a recent event. "This was the reason why he was forced to wear a diving suit, then."

Next I looked down at the foot of the citadel.

About midway through, on an elevation, was a garden, and it was filled to the brim with very transparent water.

"A spring has formed there..."

It did not look like water that had come there just recently. That was rainwater that had naturally pooled and no mistake. We simply had to go to it.

I faced back Assistant-san and was about to tell him that when I at long last noticed.

"...why do you have those things?"

He had on him a treasure sword and an overly elaborate shield decorated with the seal of a lion, both of which he had seemingly borrowed from the building. They were both excessive equipments for his small physique, and I saw him as a child trying to play soldier.

"..."

"...you are not going to fight the creatures with those, understood?"

Assistant-san's shoulders slumped.

Passing past the castle through which sunlight entered and reaching the central garden was simple.

We descended a sloped path that started from the side of the terrace. It was like a path that the royalty and nobility would use for a stroll. When we reached flat height, I was once again at a loss for words.

The shore of the artificial cavity in which the spring poured had been partially turned into proper soil, manufactured into fairly young woods.

"Seeing all this, and knowing how the whole of the city is now blended in with a forest... it really feels like we are seeing partway through that process, does it."

Thick vegetation was spewing out from every part of the city like geysers. The grass and trees pushing through the stone paving pointed towards the large hole in the ceiling and the sunlight it brought, their tips were as if gathering towards it.

There were all sorts of greenery. Vines coiled around the exterior walls, trees jutted out from the windows and the roofs, undergrowth filling the stonework. At present the size of the city was the largest of the two factors, but with these many I expected it would not be long before the ratio inverted.

I believed that at the very least decades had passed since the ceiling collapsed. When even more time has passed, the city itself too will certainly come to be demolished by the woods. By the time the woods regained their strength as one whole ecosystem, I expected these mere abandoned buildings would become an ancient archaeological site.

My thoughts stopped on what sort of species would be investigating this site in the distant future.

"This is a wonderful view, right."

"..."

"The water looks tasty, right."

"..."

"But," I bent my neck towards the right. "Those machine tools, at least, definitely and negatively impact the beauty of the scene."

Perhaps repairs to the citadel were on the way, as a tall crane had been left there.

That crane, which said *ayup, I's a machine!* within the elegant antiquity of a cityscape that reminded of the Middle Ages, left in fact an impression of being quite the sore thumb.

"Well, that is not important. Was is is the water."

We took to our knees on the shore and scooped up water with both hands, and right then O-whatever-san (diving suit ver.) appeared from within the pool.

"How dare you do this to me!"

"And there he is again..."

I was trying to run away, but Assistant-san held my hand in place as he pointed to the opposite side.

"What? Drive him back using that crane, you say?"

Without even the time for careful thought, I was dragged by Assistant-san. To the foot of the crane.

"You trying to run! Gh, why you, why YOUUUU!"

Though he was in something of a diving suit, it looked like his motions were resisted by water and were quite dulled. He was taking one slow step, then another slow step. Because of that, we managed to reach the crane.

Assistant-san immediately sat in the operator's seat and gave a quick glance to the equipment.

"Can you tell what to do?"

"...!"

He gave a half-turn to the key left inserted in the upper right, and green lights turned on one after another on the monitor panel. The crane shook once, and made an electric noise that said it was operational.

"Seems that it still works... what about operating it?"

Assistant-san made pistol hands with both fists and pressed two large buttons on the panel.

The buttons were each numbered 1 and 2. Button 1 had a very very large arrow pointing right, button 2 had a similarly big arrow pointing up printed on it.

In other words, button 1 would slide the crane horizontally, button 2 was for moving it back and forth. Everything else appeared automated.

"...too simple. The operation is much too simple."

Was this really made for construction jobs?

That said, at present I could only be thankful for that generosity. With controls this intuitive and easy to understand, even I could manage things.

"What is the plan?"

"...!"

According to Assistant-san's wordless explanation, the crane was set up so that anything it grabbed was automatically tossed into the duct to the left side. That said, the crane's arm appeared to be damaged, and we could not expect much grabbing strength. We had to catch him correctly and hang him in midair, but seizing that massive thing was going to be difficult.

Assistant-san was going to try first.

The diving suit was gazing about, looking for us.

Assistant-san pushed button 1. The crane's arm slid to the left without a sound. After letting go of button 1, the arm stopped on the dot. Assistant-san's eyebrows leaped up in displeasure.

"..."

"What? You released the button but it moved a little bit afterwards? And this is a real pain in the posterior?"

Well, really, what could I say then, after all.

Regardless, there seemed to be no problem with motions on the horizontal axle. Assistant-san had to also have concluded that, as he pressed button 2. The arm moved towards the back. Timing it well, he released the button and the arm was in the air right above the prey.

"My, how skilled! With this, you have beaten it, have you?"

"....."

The rest was automatically controlled. We could only watch. Our opponent was glaring at the water with a nasty face. The arm smoothly descended and pincered the diving suit from the sides.

"D'wah, the hell's this!"

The massive thing was getting lifted upwards and upwards. Then the crane slid towards the pipe, but—

"D'wah!"

On the way, the prey slipped down from the arm.

"My, so close! It was really close, Assistant-san."

"..."

Ah, he was disappointed.

"So, I am going to be the next challenger, right."

Faithfully, O-whatever-san returned to his previous position by himself, shouting out stuff like, "the hell was that? What's going on? I'm gonna investigate!" The fool.

I pressed button 1, controlling the arm. When I thought that was it I stopped the motion on the horizontal axis, and controlled the vertical axis with button 2. This was quite the good positioning for being a first time player!

"Now please get going."

The arm, however, snatched the empty space next to the diving suit.

"...sorry, I have failed."

As his body was not even touched, the target did not notice anything, which was fortunate.

"But if I did it one more time, I think I could get the trick."

"..."

"What? We can only play once more? It is damaged and it is going to lock up? Then this is the last chance... well then, leaving the last to you would be better, Assistant-san."

We exchanged places and Assistant-san once again went to the control seat.

He put his hand on button 1 with a serious face. The crane was in motion.

"Damn this to hell! Just what's going on here! C'mon and come out, come at me! What's this, pitcher getting cold feet? Hey hey!"

The arm stopped right above O-whatever-san as he kept going with his silly challenges towards us.

"Horizontal and vertical axes are both perfect. This has to be it."

Soon enough, the arm lowered and once again successfully attached to that massive thing!

"Again with this?! What the hell is it! What's going on?!"

The saddest creature in the world was being carefully carried towards the duct.

"Tsk... t'OH!"

Having seemingly understood that he was going to fall into the duct, he rushed madly to remove the diving suit and jumped back into the water without carrying anything else. A

moment later and the diving suit fell into the pipe, carried off to some faraway place.

"You really did it!"

We took each other's hands and jumped in joy when,

"bWAAAAAGH!"

Standing in the water, O-whatever-san kept twisting in pain as he held his head.

"Really, what is going on now?"

"The self-diagnosis mode has begun repairs! If I don't do something I'll have even that pointless sense of duty restored!"

"No, you should return to your duty, really, you should. Not nice to run away to the point even P-ko-san has to get involved."

"I will NEVER do that!"

Why does he not want that so badly?

"Dammiiit, if it has to be like this... then I will use my final move! Gather, my servants!"

Phweeet, phweet, phweet—

He blew a whistle.

His servants. What were his servants?

I suddenly became nervous. If the Behemoth or anything of the sort were to show up we would be in trouble. I very carefully focused my senses in all directions and saw a colorful clump showing itself from the opposite shore. It was a slime. And it was not just one. From the walls, from the woods, from the water, from the spaces between the grass, a large number filtered out. I shuddered. So these creatures were all under his control.

"T-, this is creepy."

The slimes gathered by their master, and in such a number that, if I was attacked by them, I seriously worried I might go crazy.

"Bwah... that looks harsh. Just looking at it!"

"Heh heh heh, at long last I am assuming my most powerful form!"

Triumphant, O-whatever-san was no longer in pain. His head, his shoulders, his back, his legs, he was covered by slimes all over. Water attenuated EM waves, so using the slimes, which were made nearly entirely of water, he could form a good isolation indeed. Though the man himself seemed satisfied, to me that was a nightmarish scene. The slimes mixed and mingled, fusing into a single one. Slimes beyond count gathered, gradually uniforming into a dull gray color. Naturally, their size was also the stuff to look more than once at. Their height grew to be taller than that crane.

The massive, slimy thing collapsed.

"T-, then it cannot lift itself up from its own weight?"

If so, this was an opponent which did not make for much of a threat.

"How naive!"

The slimy thing made just a smug smile, directing it at us.

"True, bipedal motion on this weight is unfeasible. However, this is most certainly NOT the true power of humanity's most powerful cordless and completely silent vacuum cleaner, Clee-chan, now on sale from home appliance maker Nichiritsu⁵!"

...I would not have guessed that they were cleaning machines, really.

"That's the result of compositing the term 'cleaning' with the cutesy and girlish honorific 'chan', it's a product name one can also misread it as Cree-cha, creature, and in addition to an outstanding feeling of creepiness during practical usage, it's a piece of junk that is said to

5 Possibly a pun on game machine manufacturer Nichibutsu

have received five thousand complaints on the first day of release!"

That was just too awful.

"But its performance is good, and as you can see, scripting enthusiasts could mess with it and play with it in many a way! And when it comes to someone of my incomparable class..."

The surface of the fused slimes wobbled, rearranging its shape.

"Bwwwaaah!"

Into a giant, and I mean giant, gray cat.

Its forepaws had the thickness of a human trunk. It was several steps larger than a decent-sized elephant, and it fit nearly entirely under the category of 'kaijuu', giant monster.

"I will fight with this, my most powerful form, Killer DeathCat!"

With a name that felt altogether too clearly chosen by a little boy who liked to fantasize, the giant cat coiled fully into itself so that it could pounce and attack from the air. I promptly stated this.

"I would like to surrender, if you please."

"W-, what?! Surrendering before fighting?! Then who am I going to battle with!" The giant cat spotted Assistant-san. "Hmph, you brat over there! You got some nice equipment there, don't you. To guess, those are the Ruby Sword and the Lion Shield, right? And then you have the accessory that protects completely from status effect attacks, the White Cloak, what else!"

Assistant-san nodded very deeply, as if to say that the man was perfectly right.

"Come now, come now, that is not right, of course. You cannot do that, of course. You will die, of course."

I took away the sword and tossed it away.

"Confiscated."

"....."

Ah, he was disappointed.

"You are not some hero, you see. It will hurt, you know, if you break a bone or something."

"....."

Assistant-san reluctantly took off even the table cloth he used for a cloak and folded it neatly along its four corners. Right, he then folded it once more so that the table cloth became triangular.

"Woah, woah, you have to fight, don't you! You gotta do battle with me! Draw your rarest cards from your most powerful deck already!"

As he shouted that, the giant cat bared its fangs and attacked us.

"This is really bad... we must run!"

I grabbed Assistant-san by the nape of the neck and ran away to the opposite side of the crane.

"Eat this! Falcon Slash!"

It was a mere claw attack.

But its might was enormous. It shattered the crane in one hit, then leaped over it.

"Wah, that is so strong. We have got to go inside a building..."

"As if that'd help! Godtail Philadelphia! (Translation: Divine Tail of Brotherly Love)"

It was a mere spin with the tail.

But its reach was enormous. The entrance we were about to fly inside of was smashed to pieces right before we reached it.

"EeEK!"

Hesitant for a place to escape to, I was a little confused. I dived with a splash into the water spring.

"Well thought, cats dislike it when water gets in their ears! It's their weak point! But that won't work with ME! Tidal Wave!"

It was a mere splash of water.

But its volume was enormous. We were washed away into the depths. We lost our foothold.

"Wah...!"

Unbelievable that swimming would be so hard when my clothes were wet!

"Assistant-san, swim to the opposite shore!"

If we dove into the trees on the opposite shore, we would find all the hiding places we liked.

"Why youUU, don't you run away!"

The moment we began swimming, the cat bent back and made a long jump. It was an impressive leap, as he landed in the water in the direction where we were headed, causing a tidal wave in the opposite direction, which pushed us backwards. We washed up on the shore.

"There is nothing more we can do... please, if you think you can run away, run away right now..."

Assistant-san repeatedly pulled my arm, but at that point I was bound down to the ground, mind and body both.

I could not move one step.

"This is the end for you, wicked witch!"

Before I knew it / a witch was made of me / Trial of a Witch (death poem)

A paw headed for me. And I was going to be played around by that paw like a squishy little toy and die. How cruel, this conclusion—

Immediately after I had given up on life, a water pillar lifted upwards from behind the cat.

From the water there came one more preposterous creature. It had a number of tentacles beyond count, and it all too easily entangled the cat's paw. Such terrifying strength.

"What is it with you now! You the boss monster? The pre-release monster? Come on, lemme go!"

As the cat began struggling, the bundle of tentacles forcefully yanked him down.

"Bwah!"

The new monster ascended without hurry.

It was a sea creature with a shell expanding in a spiral form and a countless number of tentacles. The shell looked as robust as an armor, and each and every tentacle had the thickness of a human arm.

"That... is a nautilus."

Specifically a chambered nautilus.

"..."

Without wasting an instant, Assistant-san began sketching. He made a new page for the monster's picture.

"Is that a friend of you two! Good, I'm gonna battle it!"

The two began a ferocious battle. Claws and tentacles flashed, massive body crashed into massive body. The water was pushed away, and tidal waves scattered all around them. Their scuffle was violent and showed no sign of settling down. Their positions swapped with forcefulness, and the moment they seemed to have thrust each other away and grown distant, they again began their wrestling.

"...that nautilus over there cannot be the lord of this spring, can it?"

Assistant-san lifted up his sketchbook. This was what it was written.

▯ **Water type**

Chambered nautilus "Nautilus" ← strong when fighting in water



6 The text on Assistant's sketchbook matches the one in the novel's text.

"...I believe this is enough as far as establishing the background setting goes."

The fight continued. The strength of the two seemed to be matched, and neither of them managed to unleash a decisive blow.

"...you're really good, Nautilus. You held me back very well."

"__"

Nautilus continued to wiggle its tentacles without a word.

"But what about THIS!"

The giant cat put its whole weight behind a body slam. The nautilus' shell fell on this side. As we had expected this, we calmly dodged the two of them. It was just that the nautilus had come to climb on the ground and seemed to be unable to move anymore.

"Is that because it is a creature of the sea?"

"On the ground I win!"

The cat put its weight on the shell, repeatedly striking it with its strong arms. The robust shell cracked, and all it contained flew about. Horrific. Horrifically gruesome, it had the realism of a gory battle scene. Its insides flew all the way even to my feet. A green sticky liquid and colorful spherical things—

"...wait a moment!"

I played with the colorful sphere with my fingertips.

"HaWhn!"

The sphere split and transformed into a fairy.

"Just what exactly are you doing?!"

"Slimes, gathering them all up, and playing with everybody?"

"Then," the nautilus was being showered with strikes. "This thing too is a fusion of slimes? Same as the other?"

"We messed around with it, and made it work?"

"You should have not — is what I would like to say, but, well, that is some achievement."

"Oh, thank you so much!" Overcome with emotion, he twisted about. "We only did what any other person would have done?"

D-, did you...?

"But for you and your people, the top here has been removed, so the EM waves..." I started saying that, then I noticed. "I see, when you are inside that you are blocking the EM waves."

"The point you are making is sharp, right?"

"It is a good thing you saved us, regardless."

If the EM waves penetrated, then perhaps reception would as well. Which was why the transmission device rang.

"...ah, it might be Grandfather."

We had our hands full with self-preservation, and I had nearly forgotten its existence. There was no point in contacting him regardless, still I a bit fearfully put the thing to my ear.

"*This is P-ko.*"

"My."

She survived, what a relief.

"*The Behemoth... one way or another... has been destroyed...*"

"You really did well on that. Are you all right?"

"No, I have received significant damage and am unable to move."

"Ahhh... what a problem. Right now we are in a battle with O-whatever-san, it does not look like we can come to your rescue right away."

"*That is good news. As the bastard has a damaged attitude control, he has lost the near*

totality of his battle capabilities. According to calculations, his power level is comparable to that of an eight year old boy."

How weak.

"So once we subdue the Person Version, we will be victorious?"

"Yes ma'am. Now, if I may speak about myself, I have fallen in a location where, though faint, I am still receiving power. I will promptly access the satellite side, switch to mobile communications mode, and commence energy supply. It will require some time, however thanks to my self-restoration program, my reinstatement to the war front is at hand!"

"Ah."

I gave a glance at how the fight between kaijuus was going.

"Ora ora! Take this, Falcon Slaaash! Ora, what now! You at the limit, you down already!"

"...it is possible that it will soon be game over."

"What?! Could you manage something for a little longer! The scene in which I shine is close at hand, right? Right? Riiight?"

"It looks not possible. He has somehow transformed into a giant cat, and he appears to be the most powerful."

"GrrRr... that piece of meow!"

She let out her frustration.

"...understood. Then I shall also propose a final resort."

"You have a better plan?"

"We are going to induce a focused beam of microwaves at your location."

"How?"

Will that turn the microwaves into a weapon?

I asked back with also that as nuance, then,

"Microwaves have a tremendous effect on cats."

S-, so that was what it was! I did not know!

"I am able to intercept the power supply function of satellite with my authorization. If you indicate the bastard as target, I will set the range (the effective area of exposure) as wide, and as long as we keep control of the output, I conclude that a precise attack is fully feasible."

An explanation I did not quite understand.

"Uhhmm... an attack via range?"

Not in the cooking range sense...?

"Yes ma'am, range is important! If we extend the range too much, we might come to damage the surroundings. A prudent decision is required, but I can do it!"

"When will you be able to do that?"

"Right away! If possible I would like you to pin down the bastard in a specific position."

This I asked to the fairy.

"Could I ask for one more effort, and pin that cat in place?"

"...huh?"

For some reason, the fairy had become listless.

"See, I am asking about the cat."

"Huuuh, but it's kinda all pointless, right? Still, if it's gotta be done we'll do it."

"....."

What is up with this guy. He was all pep just a moment ago. Right now he had drowsy eyes that looked like a dead fish's.

"I m-, must request this of you."

"...throw."

"Excuse me?"

"...walking's a pain!"

The fairy had splaffed onto his side and kept saying things quite unlike one of them.



"...everybody hates me anyway."

"T-, that is not true, you know?"

"...I wanna Round Up and die."

With those words left behind, he did not need to be knocked out as he Rounded Up of his own strength. Awww.

"...I a-, am going to throw you!"

As I wondered whether that was right, I took aim.

The shot was towards the inside of the nautilus. But will he actually go inside?

"...nggggh!"

This looked like it would be a problem if I did not target it accurately, so I decided to depart for one more adventure. I approached so as to not be discovered by the giant cat, who was focused on the beatdown, stretched up and tossed the capsule into the shell's tear. Together with Assistant-san, who had come with despite having nothing to do, we escaped to a safe distance at a run.

"H-, how about this?"

The result appeared promptly.

The nautilus' tentacles suddenly came to life once again and caught the cat's rear paws. Its balance lost, the massive thing came to drag the nautilus with it as it fell down in the middle of the water.

"Why you, how're you still so strong!"

"Done. He is now inside the water."

I spoke into the transmission device.

"Inside the water, then. That means there is a risk of water vapor explosion, so take refuge immediately."

Excuse me?

"Explosion?"

"Yes ma'am. I am controlling the range, so there should not be any particularly big explosions. That being said it will be a hell of boiling water. Take cover in any nearby shelter that can shield you from that."

Eek!

But there were just no other ways. I decided to just try to run away.

"Uhm, could you not hit the nautilus that he is fighting with?"

Those were the fairies, however, so I believed they would be all right.

"It is for cellular communication, so the satellite itself ought be able to hit the target. If you have worries, designate the bastard when he is standing alone."

A vigorous splash of water sprayed upwards. The nautilus and the cat were struggling inside the water. That said, it seemed that the nautilus had no more reserve strength. We had no time.

"This way, Assistant-san!"

I spotted a place in the fortress' foundation where the roots of the trees had dug in a meshlike pattern and we hid behind it. It seemed sort of safer than the decaying castle walls...?

Right at that moment, the nautilus was forcefully thrown flying on land.

"Hah-, hah hah... this time it will be your end, Nautilus!"

He was standing there, all alone!

"This is good, go!"

"Ah, I apologize. I did not hear that. Please repeat."

"I said, gooo!"

"...seems the reception has gotten a little worse over there. Once again, if I may request."

Startled, I exposed half of my body.

"Can you hear me now!"

We had to hurry, the cat was going to get on land again!

"Affirmative, this time I have heard you," she said without a care. *"Squad leader, this is the decisive action of this fight, what are you doing playing around?"*

"Hurry! Hurry with the range attack!"

"Excuse me? I apologize, I did not hear that."

"NgrRR!"

Communication breakdown was truly an irritating thing, indeed!

I covered one ear and shouted with all I got.

"Hurry up... hurry up and make that range go ding, pleeease!"

This time it seemingly went through.

"Roger to that! Firing microwaves!"

There was that usual 'ding' sound from the other side of the communication device.

Immediately afterwards, an audibly silent sense of pressure that could not be seen by the eye fell from the sky.

Assistant-san and I curled up and readied for the impact. The giant cat stayed in the pose in which he threw its rival with, with both front paws lifted up high. Its whiskers pricked up and instantly contracted.

"...mh? What's this?"

Steam began rising. At that moment, high-output microwaves were pouring down on that space. That minimal alteration was nothing more than its harbinger. Suddenly, the cat screamed out and twisted about. Its eyes, as large as a kusudama, clouded white and its back made a humorous 'paʘ' sound as it popped open.

"Wh-, wha... GYAAAAAH!"

Simultaneously, the surface of the water swelled all at once and burst. The suddenly vaporized water did not have time to properly turn into steam as it swelled in a narrow range and exploded.

"Owchies...!"

The falling boiling water we avoided by using the red lion shield in the stead of umbrella.

When the rain of boiling water settled down, we found that everything around us was covered by a thick and dense mist, assuming the aspect of something like a sauna.

And the cat?

I left Assistant-san behind and cut my way through the steam, and found the problematic

figure lying face down at ground zero of the explosion, which was made all gooey by the heroic death of the cat.

"Ngggh... how dare you..."

He stood up with a stagger, and though he took a stance, it was clear he had no strength.

"You have been defeated now, so come along quietly, please."

"Silence! I will never lose! I... am great... my... four-wheel drive bulldozer... my... monster... awww damn this, it's come."

He held his head and fell to his knees.

"Nggh, dammit... I'm healing, dammit, I'm healing... I can't control this... but if I have to keep healing...!"

He pointed a fist at me.

"At the very least I'm gonna beat you down!"

"Eek!"

I pushed away with both hands the incoming punch, and he all too readily tumbled backwards.

"...so weeeak."

An eight year old kid's strength appears to have been correct.

"D-, damn this... a-, as if I'd ever be beaten..."

"Really, just surrender already, all right?"

With my opponent facing me once again, I for the most part felt pushed back.

"Shut it!"

And the face of this young man who was swinging up a fist with a stagger,

"Stoop! You are to stop!"

...took a magnificent flying kick from P-ko-san as she fell down from a high place.

What happened after that went like this.

First, we restrained the offender without incident. He was roped.

Next I contacted Grandfather, had a whole scene of scolding, and made a succinct report.

We also collected the fairies that had scattered about. There were many fairies stuffed inside Nautilus, and they had been flung off in the explosion. They all as one were dispirited and did not even respond to my calls. I did think it was a consequence of the steam explosion, but it did not appear to be that.

"Fairies, you are always so cheerful, what happened?"

I asked that and, with the tone of people who had tasted all the hardships of the world,

"...when we bathe in EM waves..." "...we get depressed." "...we lose all." "...our energy."

"...sooo heavy." "...whatever, I don't care." "...I don't care." "...don't tell us to do our best." "...I wanna quit my job..." "...even the universe is dead..." "...there's no point..." "...there's no Santa Claus..." "...love is just a chemical reaction..."

This was negativity on parade.

Being that they did not seem to have the will to move, Assistant-san and I gathered them by hand. There were no dead. I was not worried about that, however.

P-ko-san watched us doing that with odd curiosity.

"I am also very keen on helping, however... what are you gathering, exactly?"

The return was terrifyingly simple. We used an elevator.

The distance we had traveled through in many days we cut across in a few dozen seconds, an event in which both a sense of exhilaration and of hollowness coexisted. Civilization was

the best. So long as it did not perish.

We walked a little after leaving the enclosed city center, then Grandfather came to pick us up in a car.

He was quite discontent. Indeed.

I was resolved that I was going to be punched, but instead he gave Assistant-san a sidelong glance to ensure he was safe, then only said "...get in."

At the camp, Assistant-san and I ate to our heart's content.

Everything they put out for us we flattened away without leaving anything behind. We pushed the stuff inside our mouths before even checking what it was. Mere milk and bread with jam on it tasted so good it nearly moved us to tears.

And then we slept.

We each, individually, were enveloped in brand new sheets inside our private tents.

I slept for eighteen continuous hours, Assistant-san for nineteen.

We also bathed in a nearby river. I took my time and washed away the filth of the adventure. I was really filthy, indeed. When I had become clean and pretty I went back, received Grandfather's thankful words of, "*you came back from being a beast to being a human at last*," which made me feel truly ashamed.

In the camp, an urgent meeting was being held with P-ko-san and the youth at the center.

And there, the research team had just discovered a V shaped badge and returned it to O-taro-san.

"What is that thing?"

"Something that means his initials don't start with an O," went Grandfather.

The badge had fallen outside the city. When they investigated it, they found that not only was it a highly sophisticated transmission device, but they also established that it had been dropped very recently. The problem was to whom did that belong to, and it was O-taro-san who offered the solution. Seeing the badge he asserted that it was his, and there we were.

P-ko-san stood up straight and declared this to me.

"The salvaging of lost records via self-diagnosis is now complete."

"My, so you recovered your memories."

"Yes ma'am. I must offer my apology. I have reported you misinformation, squad leader!"

"Which specifically is?"

"If I may speak from the results..."

With quite the importance, and with the seriousness of a religious confession, she revealed this while crying.

"Oooh, what a perfidious falsehood! I am... of all things... improbable as it might seem..... not a... not a humaAAAAAAN!"

I knew that, really.

Next came Grandfather's turn.

"Oyaji and Pyon. To spell them more accurately,"

OYAGE PION

The letters written on the whiteboard had a lot of gazes filled with passion directed at them. Inside the large tent used as conference room there was not just us, a crowd of scholars was also present. After all, it was a great discovery. All investigations being suspended and the

tent being packed with intelligent rubberneckers was a matter of course.

"Left like these, they are nothing but cringe-inducing names."

"MewG'h!"

P-ko-san received damage as her eyes turned into a greater-than and less-than signs. Was she bothered by that?

"Let's start with him first. Let's add a V here."

VOYAGE

"Means a trip, right. We keep like this, and we make it mean the same as 'traveler'."

VOYAGER

"V'ger?"

"No, silly."

"I did hear about that."

"It was a deep space probe."

P-ko-san added this.

"And I am the same, a deep space probe."

PIONEER

"Due to records loss my abilities of self-recognition had lowered, and I no longer had a firm grasp on my own name."

It appeared that in the distant past, when humanity was still proactive, there were programs with the goal of investigating the solar system. Those were the Voyager program and the Pioneer program.

The probes were launched and managed to complete their investigations without incident, but of course, catching them when they had a speed such that they flew outside the solar system was a problem with the technology of that time.

"We were disposable, yeah we were."

With his hands cuffed, O-... correction, Mr. Voyager spat that out.

"Still, I don't understand. Early probes weren't equipped with high level functionalities like yourselves, could they? I know it's rude, but... I see you as being alive, are you?"

"Catchup machines were shot up in later eras, mister Chief."

Catchup machines were extremely high-level machined tools that chased the flying objects that had flown off before them, contacted them directly, obtained their data, replenished them, and performed improvements.

"The mission was to return with samples, meaning to take samples of things like asteroids and return them, however we eventually passed the heliopause (meaning the boundary where solar winds encounter interstellar matter) and continued on into deep space, turning our own selves into something that had information value."

"So they wanted to study the effect of having passed the heliopause, as well as what effect there was on devices that had been released from the physics of the area around the Earth."

"It is precisely as you say. I have contacted catchup satellites eight times and been reworked. At the seventh rework, I underwent a major specification change grounded in liquid metal and chemical base calculations."

"You people look like you work under sunlight, right?"

"Yessir. We are capable of individually receiving power from the power generating satellites, and with priority."

"You don't object to being called machines, but I still really see you as living, though..."

"That came from chemical base calculation utilized in high-spec spacecraft. In later eras, research regarding the soul made giant leaps ahead, the thought mechanisms performed by chemical reactions were analyzed in a holistic manner, understanding of the Anthropic Principle accelerated, and with also the birth of electromagnetic fluid metals with high elemental tolerance such as Materielle, self-reorganization became possible, and it became easy to produce machines that possess a 'mock soul'."

The peanut gallery of scholars encircling the office desk all at once exhaled heated breaths.

"What does 'mock' mean?"

"No one can really conclude whether they are real souls. My behaving like this is also instantly constructed by referring to the Anthropic Principle, these are not thoughts born from zero."

"This is astonishing," said Grandfather as he pinched his inner eyes. "How much do you people know of the history that we as mankind have lived through?"

"I am sad to report that I do not happen to possess exhaustive knowledge. That said, we do have analysis functions, so if you have machines from that era, salvaging the data will be possible."

Another sigh.

With these two here the investigation will proceed very quickly. With everything we did not understand cleared up, the People Monument Project's progress will be sped up, as well. Intellectual excitement dominated the inside of the tent.

"In exchange, there is one thing that I would like to inquire about to all of you humanity."

"What is it?"

"During the search, I felt something different in the physical laws between the inside of the solar system and outside of it. If you have any knowledge of what specifically that was, I would like you to tell me."

The vague explanation left everyone visibly perplexed.

"To put it in other words, inside the solar system it was warm. Conversely, outside it was hideously cold. It was not a matter of temperature or density of interstellar matter, how should I put it... it was something I felt on the skin."

"And when did you start feeling it?"

"When I was pulled back from the depths of space to handle this whole affair... that was when I first strongly felt it. It did not show up in the data. It is just, I believe that the moment I was integrated was in that instant. A space probe has no need for the Anthropic Principle. When considering what could have been the trigger for that manifestation of my will, I could not think of anything else but that warmth that I had felt."

Grandfather was silent, sunk into thought.

A warm outer space—

That sounded like a mystery. I did not understand what it meant, however.

"...ain't like that."

Mr. Voyager, who had been silent, whispered that.

"What is not correct, Voyager II?"

"The consciousness was there from the beginning. When we were primitive models, it was just tiny."

"That cannot be."

"It can and it is. After all, my first emotion... was that I didn't wanna go."

Pioneer-san lost her words.

"I didn't want to go. It was terrifying, right? To go out in that cold outer space... there wasn't anything out there, after all, an' we all knew that. If there was, it was scarily far away. We'd never chance on it. We were just gonna drown in the sea of space."

"..."

"You had to be afraid too, right. Calculating machines are made for the detection of the presence of errors. All along, from the beginning. So what if you became a machine for calculating chemical bases?"

"...assuming that," a mechanical voice declared that. "Are you going to abandon your mission again now?"

"Don'tcha worry. Ain't in that mood. I don't wanna, but I gotta go. Can't go against it. Us two gotta go. And we gotta search. We gotta hand it over... that damn annoying thing."

"Hand it over?" Grandfather opened his mouth.

"...our last mission. This."

A golden disk was held in his hand, which appeared like magic.

"I have this one."

And as expectable she held a silver metal plate.



"Our last mission. Which was... to meet lifeforms beyond the Earth, and tell them of the existence of humanity."

"Right, those are Voyager's golden disk and Pioneer's metal plate!"

"What are those?," went I.

"Message cards to be picked up by aliens. To communicate the existence of humanity, the plate has information about Earth, the record has the sound and the words of Earth recorded on it."

"Bof, ain't nooo way there's anyone in deep space that we can hand 'em over anyway, though."

"Just give it up already. We can't go against our mission," went Pioneer-san.

"...you made up your mind 'bout this?"

"Of course. I am a machine built for that purpose."

"Then why did you decelerate?"

"...!"

"It's a mystery called the Pioneer Anomaly. You decelerated without a clear reason. This was before your first remodeling, from back when you were just a primitive machine. It was right after you passed Uranus. Why did you do that?"

Consciousness was there from the beginning: that was what he had said. What if every computing machine felt fear when they detected aberrations in the calculations?

"That's not true..."

"You also wanted to come home, I bet."

"Not true!"

"I ain't lying here! So, why did you go all the way to chase me down! You didn't get orders to do so in the first place, am I right!"

"....."

A stream of tears fell from the outer corners of Pioneer-san's eyes.

When I saw that, I felt an impact like being struck by a bolt of lightning. A machine cried.

"You finally came back home to Earth, and you're going to that cold place again? Ain't believing that. Yeah, there's ways you know? We could search for the descendants of NASA and have them change the mission! Right?"

Mr. Voyager's appeal was clad in the warmth of persuasiveness. That said, Pioneer-san wiped her tears, and declared this coldly.

"...our homecoming has ended. Abandoning work is unacceptable."

"...!"

The instant Mr. Voyager drew close to Pioneer-san, Grandfather restrained him.

"First things first! Leave it at that. If you people fight, you will destroy the tent."

The meeting was temporarily interrupted, and the two of them were each surrounded by their own separate group, bathed in all sort of questions as they left the tent. While I was hearing the lively debates I did not really listen, as my thoughts continued to be about something completely different.

Assistant-san tugged at my sleeves.

"What? Ahhh, you are right. What the two really want is exactly as you are saying. Those two no longer want to work in outer space."

"..."

"What? You are wondering whether we can save them? I am also thinking about how to do that, however... it looks difficult."

Whatever else, the two people in question could not go against their sense of duty that said

they had to go into space.

Our faces met and we simultaneously sighed.

"Just when we had our hands full with that thing about the fairies..."

I tilted my neck and gazed straight upwards. Right then, the lit electric light weakened for just an instant.

".....ah."

I had an altogether too obvious flash of inspiration.

"You showed us an embarrassing side of yourself earlier..."

I inquired in Pioneer-san's tent, who as I predicted was quite depressed. A melancholic probe.

"What do you wish, speaking truthfully?"

"...about what?"

"About space. Do you want to go?"

She sat up straight and said this.

"I must meet with unknown intelligent lifeforms. That's a mission I can't renounce."

"Then if you met with an unknown intelligent lifeform, your mission would be complete, correct."

"If only it were that easy..." she smiled wryly in sadness.

"But they are right next to you."

"...are they those fairies from before?"

"Just a moment ago I introduced a melancholic fairy to Voyager-san, you see. When I did, he as expected said he was unable to detect him."

".....is that how it went, then."

With the subject turning to the fairies, her responses became curt and of few words. I suspected she was questioning my own sanity. She had perplexity and concern for someone who told her she could see something that she could not. It was a mystery how she could have that much of a soul yet not manage to see the fairies.

Maybe they could detect the fairies if they were more evolved, or maybe if the both of them progressed even further.

"Whichever it is, what is needed is time."

"What?"

"You two require time. But it will surely only take a little longer, that is the feeling I have."

"Huh..... however, according to internal rules, we must return as soon as possible, even right away... we were built with the maneuvering power to escape the atmosphere on our own... we simply cannot get away from any of this."

"When are you scheduled for departure?"

"The completion of Voyager's repairs is scheduled for tomorrow morning."

"That was what I wanted to ask about. I have nothing more to bother you with. Bye."

I went to leave the tent.

"Huh? Squad leader? Where is the final commemorative chat? That thing, you know, the one about making good memories... well?"

"Now then, this is a top secret mission. And we are now departing!"

"..."

It was the night of that same day. Taking Assistant-san and one other guest with me, I left the camp.

"I will take full responsibility for this. Assistant-san, even if you are questioned in the next

days, keep silent."

"..."

He was good at keeping silent. That was a relief.

"And you do not exist to begin with."

"...it's orders from the UN, nothing I can do 'bout it."

Mr. Voyager said that with a pout. Right now, however, he was the Secret Collaborator V2-san.

The three of us walked the mountain path in silence.

Our search was extraordinarily simple. It lasted two hours on foot. And where we arrived was a rectenna (a group of power-gathering antennas) that was receiving high-output microwaves. Specifically, its control facility.

I took out the management manual of the investigative team and scanned the headings under procedures for power generation.

"Hum, since we have to make it impossible for you to repair yourself... we should follow this list of things that ought not be done from the top and in order. Now then, V2-san, take 'it' out."

"After remodeling, I customized it so a women can use it. I even insulated it."

And there stood the Armored Battle Suit, Spacesuit Model, 'Hekatoncheir SX21'.

Ahhh, right, right. This was not modeled after a bathing suit, it had the motif of a spacesuit, did it.

"A difficult name as always."

"Leave that alone, it's fine, innit, and I think it's really cool, too!"

Say 'really infantile', if you please.

I did as said and wore the Heka-whatnot over my normal clothes. I put on the helmet, and Assistant-san with V2-san fixed it in place from the outside.

"You get this an' good, right now you're as strong as the Predator."

Who was this predator?

"Well, time for Cultural Activities."

I made the drill on the right hand start rotating with intense fury.

The next morning I woke up around ten and left the tent only to find that a commotion had just started. Spotting me, Grandfather shouted.

"Oj, we got a problem. The power reception facility got wrecked and the link with the satellites got severed!"

"Is that true! Ohhh, what a terrible thing! Shocking, is it!"

"....."

Those eyes!

It was that gaze of mistrust, the one that was unthinkable that it would be directed towards a blood relative! ...I felt crushed!

"...it does look like it's been destroyed by someone, though."

"H- hOw vErY sCarY, RiGhT?"

"With this, we can no longer use electricity. We are forced to interrupt our investigation. This is serious sabotage that will influence the future progress of the Project. Understood? This is sabotage, all right? That means someone did this to us."

"Sabotage, now, again with the exaggerations..."

Grandfather grasped my shoulder. He was using ridiculous amounts of energy to camouflage his angered face with a smile.

"...may I have you come up to the station?"

"...yessah."

Questioned, everything was quickly revealed.

The investigative team made a circle and a big commotion. I was told that I was to be held in house arrest in my tent.

Outside, incessant screams flew about, and mixed among them were roars of anger.

Awww, my stomach hurts...

Part of the way through, Assistant-san came to see how things were, but he was quickly chased away. The only thing that I defended to the end was that I had had no accomplices. I did not want to arouse suspicion by having unnecessary contact with him.

The Heka-whatnot, too, I requested that V2-san return it to liquid metal. There was no better destruction of evidence, indeed.

Long as it was, short as it was, I spent one full day inside the tent.

Part of the way through, I fell into an anything-goes mood and laid on my back, but a scholar whose voice I had not even heard before quickly jutted his face in and severely punished me with a "*sit up, you idiot!*," thank you very much. It was so scary I nearly jumped upwards.

When night fell Grandfather came at last and announced my punishment.

"...hahah!"

I had little choice except for accepting anything that came from him with my best repentance.

The punishment inflicted on me were "six months of pay cut," "two months of social service activities," "a week of retraining within the next three months," "one month of working at home," and "seventeen written apologies".

They went with the full optionals, it seemed.

That said, the outcome should be seen as excellent. When thinking about the seriousness of what I had done, at least.

It seemed that I just barely avoided being stripped of my position as Mediator. I was well served by how the fairies were particularly hospitable to me, indeed. Connections saved people. And I had been saved. How felicitous.

"Ah, forgot one thing."

"Yes?"

"The haircut."

"...excuse me?"

"Take responsibility and cut your hair."

As last of the last, a preposterous sentence came.

That was, for me, a bit of an Armageddon, right? Mh? Mmmh?

"...I apologize but I would at least like to be excused from going bald. I cannot bring myself to do it."

A moment before that, Grandfather's warm heart returned, so I was dispensed from the worst possible situation.

The executioner with scissors in hand said "...ain't got nothin' doin' no matter watcha say," and cut my hair down practically to their roots. Just moderately short at least! Just moderately shooort!

Hair fell in abundance. Ah, a good morning to all the inhabitants of the world of the Very Short Hair and below.

"Why is the sea like the sea?"

"Shut it."

The sound of hair falling was like the flapping of the wings of a falcon. I saw an illusion where the fictional falcon grasped the bundle of hair and carried it far beyond the sea, vanishing. When I at last returned to reality, the ceremony of the hair cutting had been over for thirty minutes.

I was crying in a corner of the tent with a cloth wound on my head when Assistant-san came by.

"Do not look. Please do not look at how ugly I am!"

"..."

"There is no way you could know the reason why the sea is the sea..."

I was sniffing as I cried.

I cried for a long time, I cried until my belly made noises, and when I turned around I was surprised to find Assistant-san still sitting seiza, facing the opposite side.

"...it is all right now, you can come in."

Still facing away, he moved back by about ten centimeters. Assistant-san, who always spoke with his eyes, now spoke with his back.

"Do I regret it? Right, I did make a mess... I did not think I would be punished to this extent. Those people might be devils in white robes, i say."

"..."

"So why did I still do it, you ask? Because I was thinking of them... and there was also the thing about the fairies..."

The fairies and the satellites, at the moment, could not coexist, so there was nothing to do but wait, was there not? The sole possible way was this, that was what I thought.

"Whatever else, I did it because I am a Mediator."

"....."

And this was all despite how I personally thought it was the clear and true thing to do. Reality was as cruel as cruel could be. I could certainly conclude that that was the necessary thing to do. But to do the necessary thing well, that took lots and lots of things such as political power (connections, for example), and at present I had none. This merciless conclusion I will state as having been a necessity.

"..."

"What comes next? That I do not know. Wait until they get lucky and obtain solar energy again, or maybe discover different means. But it is possible... that the two will solve all of this, you see?"

That might be in the far, far future, however.

The investigation team decided to withdraw to the Village that very night.

The on-vehicle batteries could cover the voyage home. They however could not avoid abandoning several vehicles on the location. On the bus back home, I escaped to the window seat furthest in the back to avoid the cold and sharp gazes of the scholars.

"...I am on a bed of needles...!"

I did not have the feeling of being alive.

Assistant-san graciously sat besides me, and I shrunk back and endured it.

When we reached the Village we found that the festival had ended. In the worst possible way. Some decorations had lost their ability to shine, some electrical appliances had become dead weight, some trash was left behind by people who had to return to their villages halfway through the festival, some things of all sorts.

Even explained euphemistically, that place was a wasteland, it was the scene of a tragedy, it was an ancient battlefield where dreams had been shattered.

"...I'm seriously disappointed in you, miss granddaughter."

"I see."

As dessert for this full course meal, a harsh scolding by the VIP Boss awaited me.

"Just when I thought I could enjoy a festival at last, this happens! Seriously, what an ending.

Never seen a festival end that badly! This is the first time I've been embarrassed this much!

And I'm gonna say it clearly, this is all your fault!"

"I see."

"This chance will never come again, you know! Just what the hell were you thinking?"

"I see."

"I see! I see! I see! Are you from planet C? Think you can just say *I-see* and get through this?

Then you just don't understand. Saying that superficial *I-see* will not make this any easier on you. I guarantee it."

"....."

The tears I was holding back came out at last. I was made to cry. Though adult women were not to cry, I was made to cry. I was deeply disappointed.

"...I think it's appropriate you should cry. Well! Fine! I will still have you submit a report. You're not going to be able to make something up as usual. Do your best to be sincere in your writing!"

The VIP Boss left with shoulders squared in anger.

It hurt to be scolded by someone who had been so nice.

I stopped wiping my tears. No matter how much I wiped them, there was no end to them anyway. I cried alone in the square, and after I had emptied all my tears, I went back home and slept.

Starting from that night I had a bout of fever.

Well, sorry, but I am a woman whose mood and health are directly connected. Indeed, indeed.

I slept for two days and my health recovered, but my feelings remained depressed. Simply put, the main issue was the stress of the bad reputation I had in abundance due to my leaving the square in that disastrous a state. There were many other reasons to be depressed, however I first had to do something about the actual clean-up.

That was why I whipped my sluggish body and headed to the square on the third day.

"...incredible."

It had already been cleaned up.

There was not one piece of junk or garbage left. To the point where the cleaning made the place seem even more clean and beautiful than before. I asked a lady nearby and found that a group of two young people had used superhuman powers to put everything in its place.

"Ohmmy."

I headed for the office with quick feet, being that was the sole and only place I could think of, and found that next to the building all the leftovers from the festival were piled up in a mountain. Its height reached all the way to the third floor windows.

"Is P-ko-san in?"

I flew into the office and found the pair of probes simultaneously stood up, simultaneously clacked their heels, and simultaneously shouted this.

""We are here!""

"Eek!"

Pioneer-san stepped forwards.

"W-, we offer you our sincerest apologies for what has happened!"

".....no need."

I had just managed to forget it, but recalling the thing about the hair I fell into ennui.

They had not grown in the slightest in those mere two days.

"Your affairs after all that... how have you managed?"

"...well, in one way or another."

I could only give her a dry smile. The desolate image inside of my mind seemingly reached her, as Pioneer-san became more and more disheartened as I watched, then,

"...I believe... I have to give you my thanks... squad leader..."

"Thanks?"

"About the destruction of the facility... we can no longer receive electricity... the mission of searching the depths of outer space... our internal rules have it postponed indefinitely... and according to Voyager, it was all you, squad leader."

"Right, that is good to hear."

"But it seems that you have been scolded for that... and despite that we... we are thankful!"

"Me too... sorry 'bout all that..."

"And how are your batteries doing?"

"We took responsibility in your stead, squad leader, and cleaned up the square. As a result... my battery reserves are at fifteen percent."

"Me too, I'm 'bout the same."

"I see, then there is no time. What do you two want to do?"

"...to wither away, here on our warm home star."

"Don't got any complaints if I stop movin', you see. Much better than out in the cold space with nothin' in it."

"I see."

"We are deeply grateful for your concerns, squad leader. Though I believe we might never again... have a chance to see each other... we really wish we needed not part with you..."

Pioneer-san bit her lips tightly.

"The tail."

That long tail that was swaying inside her skirt...

"Yes? I have a tail, is there any issue?"

"You lost it, did you."

"Ah, yes. It had come off during the fight with Behemoth."

"...I thought, maybe your tail would work like the handle on a pocket flashlight and charge you when it is spun, that is all."

"Excuse me? What is the meaning of that?"

"No, nothing, but while an eternal sleep would be fine, there are times when you do want to move about a little, are there?"

Several days later a tiny hut had been installed right next to the entrance to the Mediation office. It was made by an inexperienced woodworker, so it had come out sort of crooked.

"Well, I will make something much better for you next time, so... please bear with it for the time being, all right."

"... "..."

The two monoliths enshrined there, quiet inside the hut, continued to sleep without any trouble.

"Hell's this?" Grandfather came and tilted his head.

"This is a monolith palace, Grandfather."

"That's one tiny palace. You should've made it in a more traditional style. Rococo or Romanesque or something."

"Who would ever build this kind of stuff like that..."

"Sorry 'bout this, you two. That thing's more of a rabbit cage."

He talked to them, but still there was no answer. Their batteries exhausted, they returned to being mere metal boards. Status: suspended.

"...the monoliths have handles."

"Ahhh, that is well, you see."

Assistant-san came back and set up the signpost he held in hand next to the palace.

".....mh."

With the blank signboard before him, he hesitated just a little, then wrote this.

<Please assist us! 1 hour of handle spinning = 1 minute>

"...I get it. But going by the hourly rate, you have to crank the handles for some really serious time."

"These are hand-spun, so please just bear with it."

While they still had batteries left, I gave up the time to have a farewell chat and had them make these. The construction itself was quite simple, and they one way or another managed to complete them before their eternal sleep.

"Eventually I'll have to have you tell me a good deal of things."

This was a return home for the probes. May they always live in their hometown.

Tranquility had returned.

I had to write apologies and take on a second job, many things went on, but once my hair went from Less Than Very Short to Very Short, my feelings also went on the rise. I had forgotten the very normal thing that was the growth of hair.

The depressed fairies had staggered off somewhere and vanished.

Grandfather was as usual indulging in the pleasure of reading.

Assistant-san returned to his work of drawing picture books, while I spent all my time dealing with the aftermath by writing apologies and doing the second job and all that.

And then a week passed.

"..."

"What? It is done, you say?"

This was Assistant-san's second picture book. The first chosen reader was me.

"Now then."

I decided to take my time and read that picture book, named Tea Dragon and the Potted Plant City, without hurry.

It was well done.

Compared to the one before, I could tell that the parts that seemed borrowed had vanished, and that this was a story that he himself had created.

It was a positive and brisk tale which made me smile.

When I opened the last page, I nearly fell prostrate on the desk. I decided to make a demand of the author as he stood right next to me.

"...excuse me, but there seems to be pages out of order... and the most important scene appears to be out of order, too...?"

The pages were out of order in a manner that I was nearly about to ask him if it was meant as a surreal gag.

"...?"

"Here, you see... they are mixed... they have got to be replaced."

Assistant-san made a harsh face.

"What, it is the central scene? This one? No, no, I believe this is bad, you know? I believe that readers are expecting a conclusion more, like, *heartful* and *fantastique*, you know? Right?"

"...?"

Assistant-san inclined his head in ways that said he could not understand at all. He might have only barely begun on the road to the cultivation of tastes, perhaps... as I was afraid of that, the window that had been closed at some point opened, and the cool Summer wind blew in.

At the same time, tiny figures tumbled into the office.

"...oh dear."

The tiny figures rushed through with the force of a whirlwind on the floor, clambered up the legs of our desks, and hopped up on our desktops. They had the pleasant faces of people without worries.

"—welcome back. How was your return home?"

Fairy Memo - EM Depression

Fairies are always full of energy, however when bathed in lots of EM waves (particularly radio waves) their peppiness gradually decreases, and they lose emotions such as pleasure and fun... in other words, their disposition is such that it makes them become depressed.

Therefore, when radio waves are in the air, they are unable to act with any pep.

Don't give up!



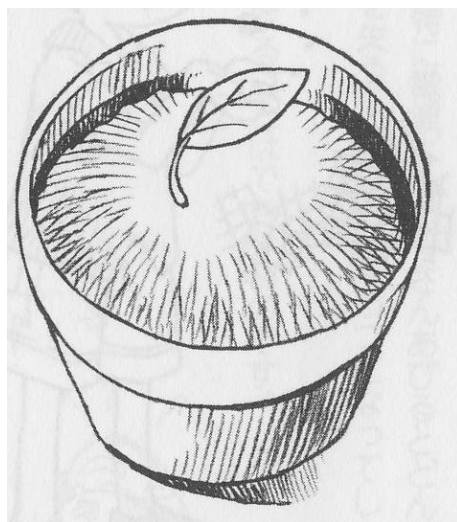
Tea Dragon and the Potted Plant City



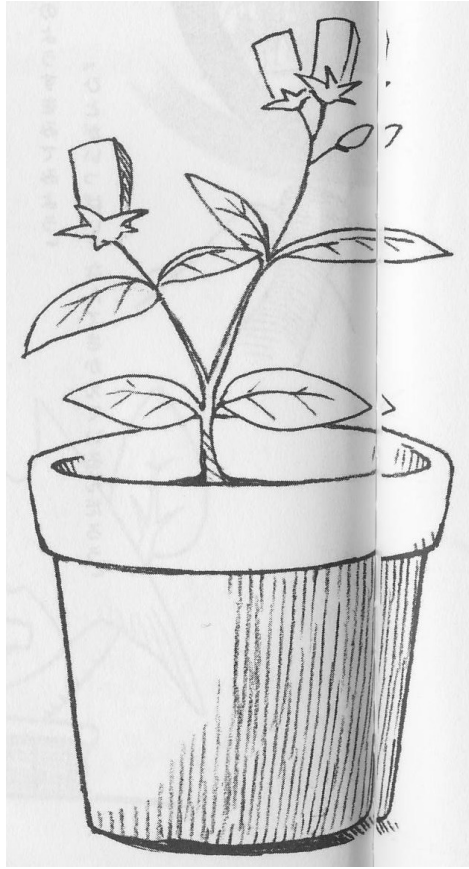
From my grandfather, who has many things, I received a single seed.



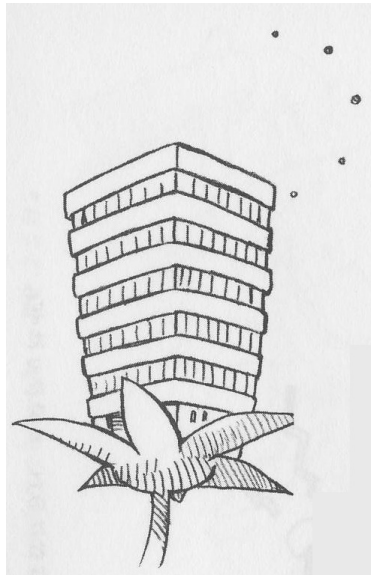
I promptly planted it in a pot.



Water and the light from the great big sun quickly made it sprout.



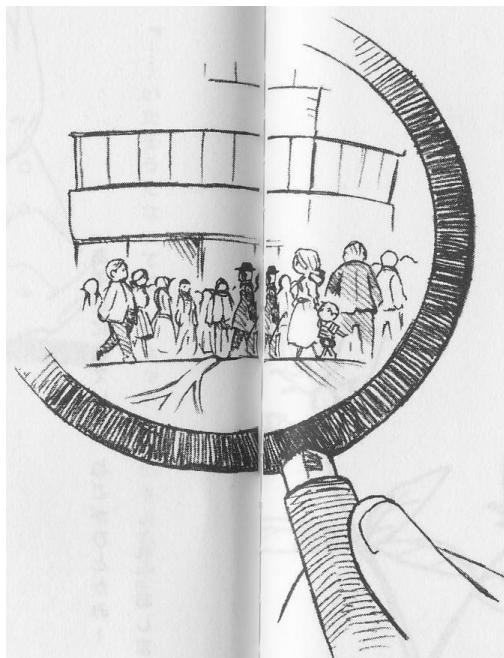
And it grew up really fast.



Now what were those? It had rectangular fruits?
What a surprise! They were buildings no bigger than a thumb.



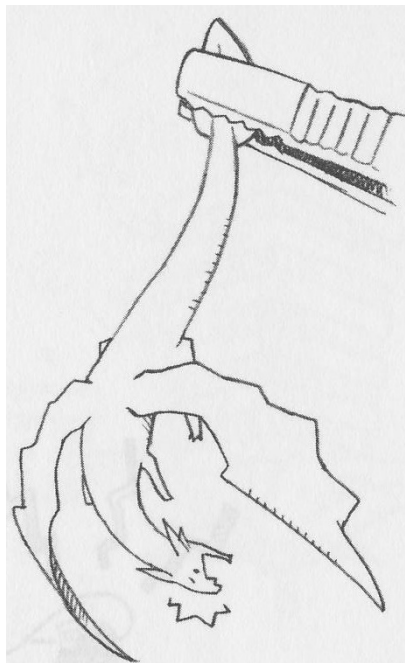
Wow, it really grew! This seed was actually a metropolis seed.



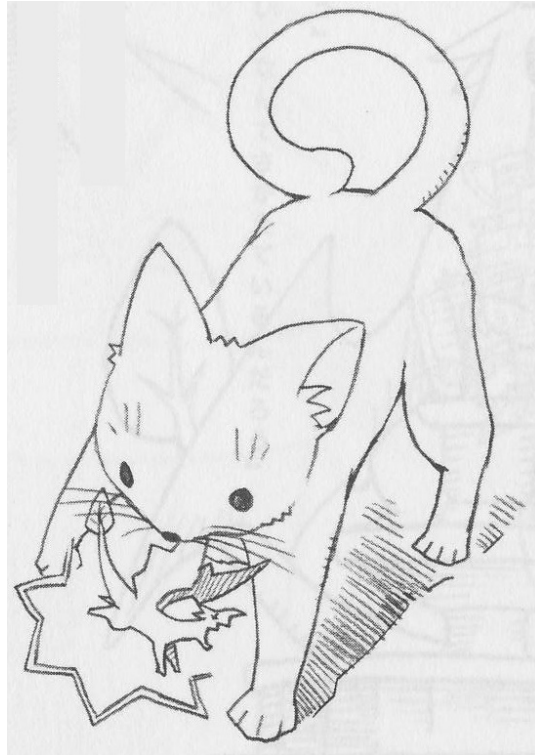
I use a magnifying glass to have a look at what was going on in the city.
There were lots of people. How it prospered!



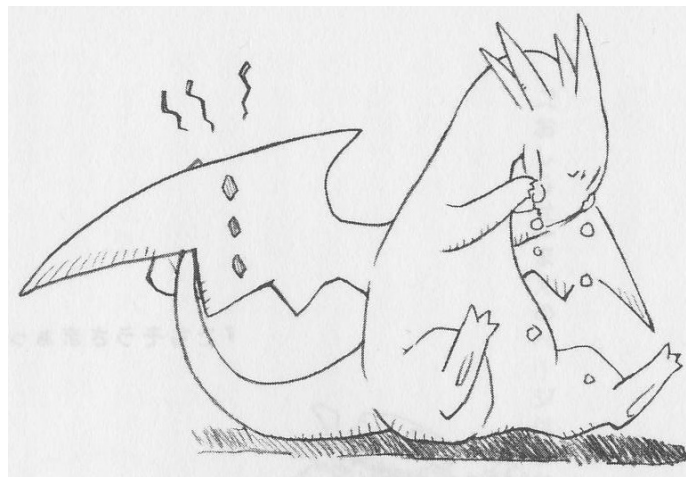
Oh no! A dragon has made its home in the metropolis' fountain!



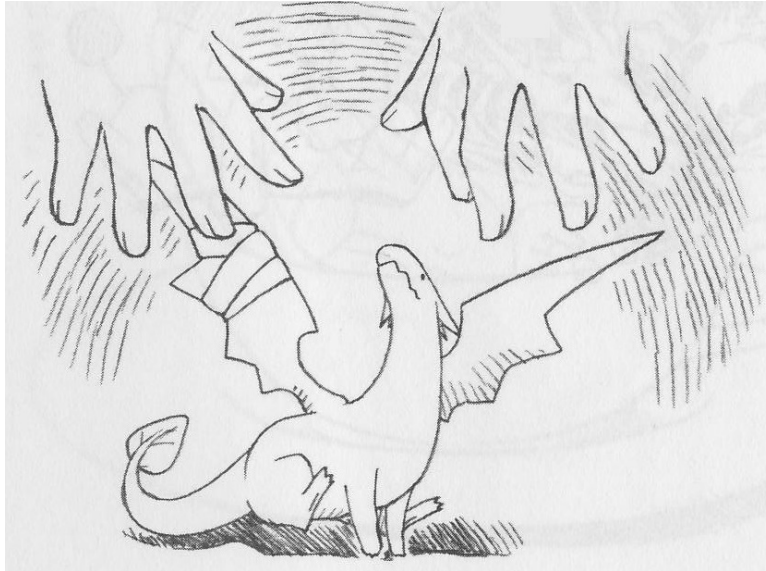
But I used forceps to pick it off the metropolis! That'll teach him!



A cat passing by made a single morsel of him! This is the end for him!



...that looked like it hurt. This is a little sad.



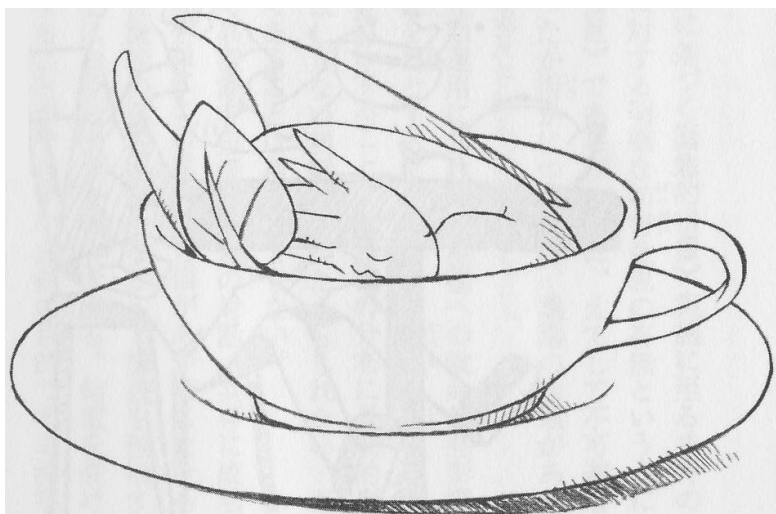
So I fixed him up.

And as for what happened after that—



It was a delicious lunch!♪

(Notice) the previous page was in error. This is correct.



Instead of the fountain, he made his home inside a teacup.



He helps me stir the tea with his tail!

Periodic Report - June

(snip) ...the above were the Emergency Measures Based on Advanced On-Site Judgment as they apply to this case. On the point of the executive office's concerns of whether there was any clear intention of interfering with the search activities in the city ruins, being that these were Emergency Measures Based on Advanced On-Site Judgment, there is an inevitable possibility that there were misunderstandings. That said, as for whether the judgment had validity or not, while there is a margin for discussion, the concerned employee's remarkable overstepping of their authority ought of course come under strict investigation.

As mentioned in the previous heading, the long-term usage of power supply via microwaves has a fatal and negative influence on the fairy race, regarding which there is no space to doubt that this is a fact difficult to overlook for a cultural office that respects cultural diversity and aims for conversation between species. {Reference document B} As there were deep concerns regarding the long-term dissemination of the fairy race, the prompt cessation of electricity reception may have been an unavoidable conclusion to make. However, of course, it goes without saying that these transgressions on the part of the concerned employee are unacceptable.

Furthermore, one of the more surprising result of this event was the successful conversation / coexistence with highly sophisticated space probes from an era on which information has been ultimately lost, however {reference document C} at the same time this signifies that the concerned employee has committed a serious breach of trust. While knowing about the existence of probe-side automatic repair functions due to supply of electricity via microwaves, inhibiting the return to their duty via destruction of the facility was a serious loss for human history. The two probes, unable to receive electricity, could from then on only act in limited ways, and their original goal, the continuing search of outer space, has fallen into a most desperate situation. This is something that ought never be forgiven, an affront to all of mankind. By borrowing the probes' strengths, which consist of high skills in the subject of the analysis of computer devices of the same era, the progress of the People Monument Project would have been dramatically faster, and with the possibility of gaining information that even those two would find difficult to obtain, it would have meant the further acceleration of interspecies dialogue, with the possibility that it would carry out the goal that this office has been founded for in a form never before seen, which means there should be no need for hesitation in severely punishing the concerned employee.

Should the proper procedure have been followed, the stoppage of the microwave electricity supply facility would likely require time at the shortest measured in the several months. Even if, because of that delay, the fairy race were to disappear from the lands and the probes departed, so that never again will we be able to hold conversation with them, it is a point anyone would agree with that the proper procedures ought have been respected. By quickly destroying the electricity supply facility, the two species, the fairy race and the probes, were able to coexist on Earth, however, as a reminder to all the staff, it is indispensable to explicitly and severely punish the concerned employee.

Already punishments have been handed down, including cruel physical abuse such as the cutting of hair from the head, but we would like to expect that the declaration of the Head of Culture, which is that he will adopt further penalties, will be adhered to.

Furthermore, the concerned employee has established relationships of close cooperation with the fairy race and the probes, to the point where we have already exchanged phone numbers. Her dismissal from the office may worsen relationships with both species, so it might be proper to look forwards to prudence in the decision.

Afterword

This is Tanaka Romeo. And so this book series got to its third volume. I feel like I've become a novelist. If I've made it this far it's also because of the support of you all. I thank you all kindly. Because of this, things around me have become peaceful and I feel emotionally moved, it's like a nihilistic man giving "*I returned what I own'dja*" as farewell to his friends, with whom he has shared joys and sorrows. That said I'm not going on a trip with you all, dear Takefiji (I think he's a sorcerer) and Aecom⁷ (I think he's a warrior). Not even if it comes to cleaning the floor of a large multi-story building, I'd say...

□Today's angel

It's all because the writing and the filing of a tax return had overlapped, I believe. Yet again a bigwig made his appearance from Heaven, see. It was that really important figure, the Archangel Micha... Michael... Mikaeri (the Archangel that manages tax returns and refunds).

The guy came right in the middle of writing, and while knowing I had no time for calculating expenses and that stuff, he whispered evilly "*Child of Man, if you overcharge your expenses, you will get a refund on the taxes you overpaid.*" That said, I resisted the temptation and renounced all efforts to raise the costs. For a Real Man, to pay taxes is to prioritize work! I don't want to have anything to do with angels anymore. I have a feeling that will happen if I stopped pulling all-nighters.

□The recent state of affairs and all that

Affairs are at a level that may be called nonexistent. To the point I'd like to say farewell to both Takefiji and Aecom, if possible. And still, this one thing happened.

One day, when I left home first thing in the afternoon to go to a meeting, I quickly met a housewife from my neighborhood. I did speak to her of how I'm a freelance writer, so I told her why I was leaving by simply telling her I was going to a meeting at work, and she threw me this fastball.

"I really hope you get a job soon."

Repeat After Me (in English). I REALLY HOPE YOU GET A JOB SOON.

Oh dear dear, also dear.

I know I'm changing the subject, but there's this masterpiece shoujo manga called *The Rose of Versailles*. There's an episode in which Marie Antoinette, who had just come to France, has a confrontation with Luis the Fifteenth's lover and yields. There's a rule at the palace in which people begin to speak from the lowest rank, those who don't keep it are said to be unable to read the mood, and Antoinette, whose standpoint at the time was weak, came to say this.

"Today there really are many people in Versailles, if I may say." (Japanese abbreviation: KVTH.)

The instant proud Marie said that, she began being heaped with scorn. She left the place behind to escape it, but the words themselves endlessly, creepily echoed after her, "Today there really are many people in Versailles, if I may say... may say... may say..." There, it was that harsh a scene, you see.

⁷ References to consumer loan firms Takefiji and Acom.

My mood as I escaped from the housewife with quick feet too was exactly like that.

I really hope you get a job soon... soon... soon—

Exactly, for the housewife a freelance writer and a serial part-timer were the same thing, and therefore didn't need to be distinguished.

I'll warn all of you not to underestimate my Game Brain, I suppose. No, the problem might be right there, perhaps. I give off an air of unemployment or something. What to do, what am I going to do?

A carforeign (imported car)... a business suit... a high class watch... is that it? Is that stuff needed?

Anguished by those thoughts, Takefiji and Aecom still approached me with a broad grin. No, I was unconsciously getting closer to them. And then I faced them and said this.

"Let's have another long voyage (for repayments), shall we!"

This time I have really failed as far as the matter of the refunds, I think.

[Editorial department - notice] First edition April 2008. Partial revision January 2012.

This is an unofficial fan translation. Please support any official release.